

LEM
ALLEN

W·P·LAWSON



Class PZ 3

Book L4475

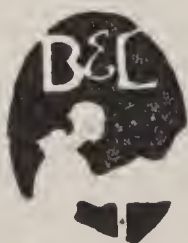
Copyright N^o Le
copy 2

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

LEM ALLEN

✓ L E M A L L E N

BY
WILLIAM PINKNEY LAWSON ✓
11



BONI AND LIVERIGHT
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

copy 2.

PZ₃
.L4475
Le
copy 2

COPYRIGHT, 1923, BY
BONI AND LIVERIGHT, INC. ✓



PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

SEP 13 '23 ✓

©C1A711888 ✓

no 2

R

TO
MY FATHER

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ARRIVAL OF ALLINGHAM	1
II. DANGER AHEAD	8
III. THE PRACTICE INTERVIEW	16
IV. A FRIENDLY GAME WITH CARDS	26
V. THE GOLDEN NUGGETT	34
VI. THE PSYCHIC MOMENT	45
VII. IN ROUT	52
VIII. A TOUCH OF NATURE	63
IX. NIGHT LIFE IN ST. JOHNS	72
X. PERILS BY THE WAY	78
XI. THE OUTLAW UNMASKED	88
XII. GOING SOUTH WITH DINGBAT	99
XIII. ALMOST BUT NOT QUITE	109
XIV. HOSPITALITY A LA DAGGETT	119
XV. ALMA	126
XVI. A MATTER OF SUBSISTENCE	135
XVII. ALLINGHAM HAS IDEAS	146
XVIII. HAZARDS OF SUCCESS	157
XIX. LUCK LEAVES THE SCENE	167
XX. THE RESCUE PARTY	175
XXI. AN INTERRUPTED RAFFLE	183
XXII. ALLINGHAM'S DEBUT	194
XXIII. A SOUND OF REVELRY	204
XXIV. LOVE AND WAR	210
XXV. KNOTS BEGUN TO LOOSEN	220
XXVI. THE CLAIM JUMPERS	229
XXVII. THE SMILES OF FORTUNE	237
XXVIII. ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS	245

CHAPTER I

ARRIVAL OF ALLINGHAM

THE first glimps I got of Allingham he was approaching the ranch house afoot, dragging along slow like he was plumb beat. At the moment he didn't look like much of an event. I didn't even know it was him — I thought it was a hobo. But when he drawed nigh where I was setting on the kitchen steps, peeling spuds for supper, I saw right off he wasn't no tramp. He was too uppity.

"Hello!" he calls out cheerful, before I could say something. "Is this the Bar T cattle ranch?"

I was about to answer him sharp — the way he started asking questions thataway without any pelimminery manners; but just then I noticed that his smile was kind of strained and he had black rings under his eyes and seemed right peakid beneath the layer of alkali that covered him. So I didn't say nothing only, "You guessed it the first time, Stranger!"

He looked pleased, kind of, and come back: "I want to see John Arnold — he's owner of the outfit, isn't he?"

"How far did you say you walked today?" I asked.

So he smiled bitter.

"Around two hundred miles, I expect. I started walking at Las Vegas, where the Santa Fé trains hesitate now and then."

"Vegas is thirty mile from here," I says, "but you'll have to hike consid'able further if you want to talk to Mr. Arnold. He's gone East — to Denver."

Well, the feller looked right disappointed. Then all of a sudden he begun swaying back and forth like he was going to fall, so I jumped up and grabbed him and eased him down on the porch and went in the kitchen and poured out a cup of coffee.

“Here, swaller this!” I says. “It’s agin the rules of the ranch for fellers to run in and drop dead ’less’n we get their names first.”

He swallowed the coffee and give a right feeble grin.

“My name’s Allingham,” he mutters; “but I don’t intend to leave my corpse for a calling card this trip.”

So then I shook hands with the feller because I was sorry for him, kind of. But still I didn’t have no idee at all that this puny-looking critter was to be a subsequent pardner of mine.

“I’m called Lem Allen,” I says, “and I’m cook for the outfit, temporary. It ain’t a situation I’d pick from choice but I drew a busted leg in the last round-up and couldn’t do no more riding for a spell, so that’s how come they wished the job onto me. And now it seems like I can’t get shut of it nohow.”

Allingham shook his head a time or two like he was sorry for me.

“What all is your business,” I asked, “if I ain’t overly inquisitive?”

He looked sort of hacked for a minute, then laughed short.

“I’m afraid I haven’t found my real vocation yet — though something tells me I’m on the edge of learning what I’m good for.”

“Well!” I says interested.

“Yes,” Allingham goes on, “because while I’d rather starve than walk back to Vegas, yet on the other hand I’d rather work than starve. Whereabouts is your foreman?”

I glanced at the sun which was dropping slow behind the Pecos range to westward.

“He ought to be in right soon — it’s nigh chuck time.”

Just then I seen a wisp of dust on the far edge of the north mesa.

“Yonder he comes now, I reckon. They’ve been brand-ing today. You’d best wash up and rest a spell before supper, whilst I stir up a batch of dough.”

So that’s what this Allingham done, and nobody said nothing when he set down to the table later nor when I split my bedroll with him for the night, because it ain’t yet got so civilized in New Mexico a stranger can’t figure on a meal and a night’s lodging without no grate hurrah raised over the affare.

But holing up for the winter is different, so next morn-ing Sam Mudge the foreman, a heavy-set, gruff-spoke feller which never laughs ’less’n somebody gets hurt right bad, looked over at Allingham and says short:

“Which way you ridin’, young feller?”

“I’m not riding,” says Allingham, “alas. I’m only walking. And from now on I’m not doing any more of that than I can help.”

Well, when he says this Mudge looked at him right hard, because it’s a fact there don’t come no visitors to the ranch on their own feet except their hoss is crippled or the car’s broke down. Then Mudge begun eating again sarcastic.

“I wisht I was rich,” he says.

“If you’re implying I am,” Allingham come back, “you’d better forget it; because the only thing I’m rich in at the present moment is time. And therefore,” he adds quick, when Mudge started to speak, “I’d be glad to receive suggestions as to how I can earn something of more im-mediate utility than that often overprized commodity.”

Mudge looked him over careful and says:

“ If it’s work you want, young feller, I ain’t one to deny the privilege to nobody. Even you. You can join the boys this mornin’ and break yourself in. We’re going to make fence. Did you ever dig postholes? ”

“ No,” Allingham says hopeful, “ but I can learn.”

So Mudge didn’t say no more, only begun to smile right cold-blooded the way he does when he’s fixin’ to enjoy himself. And directly the boys got through breakfast they all started for the new pasture. Nor I didn’t envy Allingham his prospects none, neither.

If I’d been gifted with the second sight I couldn’t have predicted what was going to happen to his feelings better’n I done, because when they drifted back at sundown you could see plain the new hand had been getting experience. He was sort of bent over in the middle and shuffled along like it wasn’t easy to lift his feet, and his hands was a sight from blisters. But he made out to smile encouraging when he seen me and didn’t say much of nothing during supper.

Nor he didn’t complain none when bedtime come and we was alone together; only, after he’d soaked his feet in hot water and put a mustard poultice acrost his back and rubbed taller into the palms of his hands, he asks careless:

“ How many postholes does it take to make a fence, Lem? ”

“ It depends some on how long of a fence it is,” I says. “ Why? ”

“ Oh, nothing,” says Allingham. “ I was just wondering. I’m naturally of a curious disposition, I suppose.”

He begun rubbing some more taller on his hands and I begun to think why didn’t he say something about being a friend of Arnold’s, like he’d let on he was when he first come.

"Tell Mudge about it," I suggested, after speaking out what I was thinking, "and I wouldn't wonder if 'twould make things easier for you."

"I'd rather stand on my own feet," he says short-like.

"Well," I says, "long as your feet lasts you." Then we didn't say much of nothing for a spell.

They worked on the fence a week or such a matter. And though Allingham was tuckered out when he come in each night, he got less crippled as time went on. Nor Mudge wasn't deriving nigh as much pleasure from his sufferings as at first.

So one morning Mudge spoke up and says:

"I got a new job for you, young feller — one which takes brainwork instead of muscle."

Allingham nodded indifferent. It's funny, Allingham never give Mudge no back talk, though I don't believe he was partial towards him for all that.

So then Mudge says:

"They's a band of twenty or thirty sheep up in the foothills to the east, which has got to be drove down to the ranch. The Boss bought 'em some time back from a Mexican homesteader there so's to clear 'em off the range. I was thinkin' mebbe you could bring them sheep in."

Well, the boys begun winking and snickering amongst theirselves, because anyone which has handled sheep knows they're the devil and all to drive, without a dog. But Allingham didn't raise no objections. He just let on he was agreeable and asked whereabouts the band was located. Then he started out, afoot.

It was after nightfall when he got back, still afoot, and leading one sheep lonesome by his suppenders which he'd tied round the critter's neck.

All the boys was laughing fit to kill, only Mudge made out he was plumb riled.

"Where'd you leave the rest of them sheep?" he asked fierce.

"Four or five lie on the trail — dead. I don't know where the others scattered to, but as soon as I can get my breath and a repeating rifle I'll go back and find out."

"You're fired!" shouts Mudge.

So Allingham sat down and fanned himself with his hat.

"Your statement lacks news value," he says to Mudge pleasant, "I knew the gist of it before I'd tried to drive those imbecile sheep a hundred yards. They're morons," he says sad-like; "they'd never pass the intelligence testers."

He hove a heavy sigh and the punchers bust out laughing louder than ever and Mudge looked like he had half a mind to take Allingham to a cleaning. I dunno what all would of happened, but just then we heard an automobile horn sound impatient from down the road and we all stopped to listen.

Presently we saw the headlights of a car and before we could more'n whistle and turn round the Boss drove up and stepped out of the car and walked over to where we was standing.

No sooner he got a glimpse of Allingham than he stopped and says, "Holy Bobcats!" and then run forrard and grabbed Allingham's hand like he was glad to see him.

Allingham give a startle and leaned over quick and whispered a word or two in the Boss's ear. Then he spoke up and says:

"I'm tickled pink to see you, Jack, old sport! Sorry to land here while you were gone, but Mr. Mudge made me feel quite at home — even let me help the boys a bit now and then so I wouldn't lack exercise."

At this the Boss give a frown.

“ You shouldn’t have done any work. It’s foolish to take chances in the shape you’re in. Captain — er — Allingham,” he explains to the bunch, “ was gassed in the war and hasn’t got his health back yet. But I’m glad you all made him feel welcome in my absence.”

With that him and Allingham walked off cordial together and the punchers begun looking at each another like they’d been caught stealing eggs. Nor it didn’t seem as if Mudge was enjoying the situation hardly at all. If the truth was known, I reckon the sheep Allingham had drug in was the only one of the comp’ny plumb easy in his mind. Because him and the suppenders had gone off to one side where the grass was better, and seemed right contented.

CHAPTER II

DANGER AHEAD

ALLINGHAM didn't give out a great deal of information about who he was or where he'd come from or what he was aimin' to do, though I asked him tactful every once in so often. He just let on he was engaged in traveling at the time, which a fool could see, so I had to be satisfied.

Another thing, Allingham never told the Boss about how Mudge had been riding him; but he didn't coax nobody to let him keep on with the light exercize he'd been enjoying, however. He just showed up cheerful the morning after the Boss come, wearing a smile and some of the Boss's clothes, and for a while afterward him and the Boss didn't do nothing but ride around the ranch looking the country over and shooting at jack-rabbits and coyotes when they got a chance.

They was about of an age, seemin'ly — twenty-six or eight mebbe, and similar built, being tall and laid out on neat lines although Allingham was more prominent in the face, especially his nose which looked right important. His eyes were green and sort of squinched up sleepy as a rule, and he had a real confident-lookin' set of teeth. Also it seemed like he was afflicted with the notion that any time he showed them teeth of his'n in a smile everything would be all right.

The Boss was more customary-looking, which was mebbe why he appeared to figure Allingham was something out

of the ordinary, a p'int they both agreed on. And then finally it got round that the Boss had been in Allingham's comp'ny in the trenches over to France and had saved Allingham's life or Allingham had saved his or something and that was why they was so thick.

Well, things drifted along for a spell till one day the Boss come in looking kind of put out.

"It's tough," he says to Allingham; "just when we're having a good lazy time together, I've got to run over to Vegas and meet a chap who's looking at mining claims for an Eastern syndicate. May have to stay several days — I suppose he thinks I can line up something for him. Why don't you come along, in the car?"

"I've seen Vegas once," Allingham says short.

So the Boss kind of laughed.

"Well, amuse yourself till I get back, if that's how you feel about our county-seat. But you've got to promise to take things easy — you've got to rest and get well while you're here."

Allingham was looking at him absent-minded.

"Is this a mining country?" he asks.

"Oh," says the Boss, "there's plenty of ore, but it's risky working it. Broken formations — old volcanic action. Yet they've got plenty of paying properties in the southern part of the State — Chino copper, for example, near Silver City. And north of there, around Mogollon, are several good claims."

Allingham didn't say no more and the conversation died out. And presently the Boss drove off in his car. Then Allingham begun for to rest.

The way he done it was to start off early each morning and land home around sundown, dog-tired and hungry as a wolf. He let on he was sightseein', though that didn't

sound right reasonable. Because if a feller wanted to see the country why should he tucker hisself out examining grazing land at close range when he could set on the ranch house porch and survey the scenery as far north as the Colorado line without moving nothing only his neck muscles?

I reckon Allingham must of got the same notion, because before long he quit riding out and stuck close to home. And I figured he was fixing to get that rest. But while he used his arms and legs henceforth only enough to keep the blood stirrin', he shore didn't give his tongue no leisure. Which was hard on me, because the rest of the boys bein' away most of the time the greater portion of the listenin' fell onto my ears. And it's the truth this Allingham proved himself a plumb spendthrift with words.

Finally it got so I couldn't stand it no longer and I plugged up my ears with a couple of *frijole* beans, and after that the patient spent most of his time laying in the hammock reading in books, or writing on a little pad. It used to stump me how he could keep the inside of his head choused up thataway constant and not come down with a fever. So finally I asked him what was the idee of it all.

"I'm writing stories for the magazines — humorous stories," he says; "funny things that happened or might have happened to the characters involved." Then he looked up and seen I'd taken the plugs out of my ears so he begun to get more pleasure from talking. "They're Western yarns."

"What do you know about the West?" I asked him.

"Nothing," he says; "that's why I chose it for a background. If a chap knows too much about the phase of life he's treating he can't make his description of it cheerful and sunshiny enough so the magazines will print it. Which is a disadvantage, particularly if he expects to get paid for his work."

“ Do they pay money for stories like that — about funny things happening to people? ” I asked surprised.

“ Certainly.”

So that give me an idee.

“ I believe I’d be willin’ to write some of them yarns if they was money in it,” I says; “ I’ve had sev’el funny things happen to me. They was the time, f’r instance, when a feller down to the Vegas hotel give me a two dollar bill thinkin’ ’twas a dollar — ”

But Allingham looked discouraged and put up his hand like to ward me off.

“ You lack the romantic sense, Lem,” he says, wrinkling up his forrid; “ you are too matter-of-fact by far. For example, you appear to accept all this — this — ” He broke off and waved his arm around at the mesa like they was something there nobody could see but him. “ In short,” he says, “ you seem to take this glorious adventure of existence in the large-hearted West as a usual, everyday thing, instead of the inestimable privilege it is. Why, man, you’ve got no soul! ”

“ I got no brainstorms neither,” I returnt, kind of riled; “ like you got.”

Then all at once it come to me what was wrong with Allingham. He was one of them fellers, I figured, which had been raised on movies and dime novels — the kind sellin’ nowadays for a dollar six bits and wherein the writer sets down a lot of things seen only with his mind’s eye and describes the looks and manners of a herd of folks observed by means of a convenient device known as a optical delusion.

“ Hah! ” I says scornful. “ The Wild West — that’s what you got in your thoughts. Nor I don’t hardly blame us Westerners for bein’ wild when we read the yarns and see

the fillums made up about us. We could be a whole lot wilder yet without no great discredit to our dispositions. No foolin', what somebody'd ought to do is git down to earth and make a real intensive tour of this here region, getting his information first hand instead of from the advantage point of Santa Fé trains. He'd ought to use a mikerscope instead of a periscope. Then he'd ought to sit down where it is cool and quiet an' write a novel book about the West that would be at least part true."

I was getting excited because I knowed I was in the right of it, but then I happened to glanse at Allingham and stopped off short, because he was staring at me like he seen a ghost.

"The very thing, Lem!" he says earnest. "You've got it!"

"What is it I got?" I asks him curious.

His face lighted up and he snapped his fingers like he'd thought of something pleasant.

"We'll get a couple of horses," he says brisk, "and ride round among the untutored denizens of the region, setting down our impressions as we go —"

"Shucks!" I busted in. "I could set down my impressions of the country hereabouts without no need to quit my job. And as for denizens," I says, "I been hunting the hills to northward this long time and I ain't seen ary denizen yet. I believe they're extinct."

But Allingham wasn't interested in nothing only his idees, which was running strong.

"On second thoughts," he says reflectful, "you'd best do the actual writing of our projected work. I suppose you *can* write?"

"Well," I says, "I got a gal in Oklahoma which I've wrote to once a month for goin' on three years. She thinks I got a right good hand."

"I'm speaking of your style," says Allingham impatient, "not your anatomy."

"Oh, I don't try much for style here in camp," I had to admit, "but if I get going on this here trip with my new neck-handkercher and boots and the spurs I bought off the Boss last winter you'll be surprised, I wouldn't wonder."

But Allingham looked right disgusted.

"Listen," he says, "here's what I mean: if you were reading some other chap's book which would you rather his stuff was — entertaining or the kind of drivel that would make you want to get up and kick the camp hound? "

"Well," I says, "it helps a lot to kick that ornery hound a good boot once in so often."

I says this because I make it a rule not to admit nothing in an argyment I don't rightly know what it's about. Then I seen Allingham was a mite put out on account of me getting the best of him, so I says:

"Anyways, let's call it a bargain that I'm to write the book you're speakin' of. What next? "

At that Allingham cheered up and his eyes glissened as the idees begun to bubble up agin.

"What a plan we've hit on! " he says. " Romance, adventure — "

"I've knowed fellers to get kilt havin' adventures," I says dubious, but Allingham waved the words off with his hand.

"An author's got to be brave and fearless," he says, "otherwise many of them would be working instead of trying to get their stuff printed."

"I ain't nowise timid if I git picked on," I says, "but I'm naturally cautious unless it is otherwise grately to my advantage."

So then Allingham looked at me reproachful for a spell.

"What you ought to do, Lem, is to lead the dangerous life for a while. Have you forgot your Nietzsche?"

"I ain't never had one," I told him; "I been right healthy so far."

He drew his eyebrows together frowning, which is a way he has of laughing when he don't want nobody to know it.

"Don't tell me you don't know Nietzsche — the singer of the superman, the poet of pep and power? Who says so eloquently of the dangerous life —"

"I ain't never been made acquainted with the feller," I says. "And while I've heard tell of the simple life and the strenuous life and a life on the ocean wave, I never heard about the dangerous life before — although seems like almost any kind of life would be dangerous. A feller's always got a right good chance of dyin' long's he's still alive."

Allingham give a sigh, despondent-like.

"We won't argue the matter, Lem. If you haven't the soul for adventure, if you haven't the courage to enlist with what the great poet calls the 'argonauts of the ideal, more courageous than prudent and often enough shipwrecked and brought to grief,' we'll give up the plan I had in mind and say no more about it."

Well, Allingham looked so downhearted when he says this that I begun to give in. I knowed there wouldn't be no grate danger of our being shipwrecked in the places where we were going and then the idee come to me that a lot of Allingham's language was just words. Mebbe, I thought, being an author wouldn't be so hazzardous a business as he was making out.

So I says:

"Don't go and get discouraged too quick. When you

know me better you'll find I ain't a feller which won't take a chance. Once in a while. If I kin afford it. Another thing, I'm gettin' plumb fed up on this cook's job they wished onto me. What is the next move after decidin' to throw in with you for me to make? "

So Allingham shook my hand cordial and give a right nice smile with all his teeth showing.

"The first thing is for you to draw the wages coming to you from Mudge, while I ponder our project in its larger aspects. When you've got the money come to me and I'll have a plan all arranged."

"Mebbe I better holp with the plan," I says.

"No," says Allingham decided, "you'll have enough to do writing the story of our tour without wearing out your brains on how we invest our capital."

So I didn't say no more then, because Allingham can out-talk me. In the long run.

CHAPTER III

THE PRACTISE INTERVIEW

ONCE I'd made up my mind to join in with Allingham's plans about leading a dangerous life and writing a book and making a hossback trip and all, I didn't waste no time getting started on the preliminaries. The next morning after our talk I got Mudge to one side where I could break the news to him easy, and asked him if he knowed where he could get a new cook for the outfit.

"The woods is full of them," he says. "Why?"

"Because I've done quit," I says.

Mudge looked kind of hacked but he didn't say nothing, only asked me what for I was leaving.

"Well," I says, "I've decided to be a author."

"A what?"

"A nauthor!" I says plain. "I'm going to write a novel book. Which takes time, so that's why I want my time."

"Is time all it takes to write a book?"

"Well," I says, "it takes money also, because a feller's got to live in the meanwhile. That's why I'm askin' for the back wages coming to me."

I hadn't drawed no pay for some months — only small amounts now and again — so I had a sizable stake and I was afeared Mudge might balk at handing it over abrupt thataway. But he didn't make no objections, just whistled a couple of times through his teeth reflectful.

"Time *and* money," he says, "what for would a feller want to write a book for if he's possessed of them two blessin's?" Then he looked at me right hard. "I don't reckon it takes no brains to be an author, does it?"

"I got brains," I says.

So then Mudge smiled sarcastic.

"I don't want to discourage you none," he says kind, "but it's my idee that if you was to take a hoss's hair and knock the peth out'n it and drop what brains you got down into the bar'l, them brains would rattle round like a peanut in a box-car."

"Is that so?" I come back.

"It's less than the facts," says Mudge; "if your brains was dynamite and you was to touch a match to 'em, the resultin' explosion wouldn't blow your nose hardly."

"How about my money?" I asked, because I couldn't stand there arguring about nothin' all day.

"You kin have it," says Mudge, and he went in the house and wrote out a check for the amount.

"Are you figurin' on payin' me board whilst you lay round writin' that book of yourn?" he asked.

"No," I says, "me and Allingham are starting out on a hossback tour and I'm to put down what happens in rout."

Mudge squinted up his eyes suspicious.

"I kin tell you in advance the first and most important thing will happen," he says, "this slick-talkin' tenderfoot'll own that stake of yourn and you'll be countin' over a passel of unnegotiable words for your share of the split. I've had that feller's number from the day he come — it's zero. He kin fool the Boss mebbe, an' knotheads like you; but he can't load me none. I've a good mind to take him to a cleanin' before he leaves, jest for luck!"

Well, I was beginning to get fed up with Mudge's con-

versation, so I explained about it to him and went off to hunt up Allingham.

"Does it take brains to be a nauthor?" I asked, when I found him.

He looked at me kind of funny a minute and says:

"What an odd question! If you knew the number and the quality of books brought out yearly you'd know better than to ask it. It does *not* take brains to be an author."

What he said made me feel better and I told him so.

"But now that I think of it," he went on without lissenin' to what I was sayin', "the process does require a sort of low knack. And there are certain elementary principles a novice should bear in mind. Perhaps I'd better run over them for you, so you won't waste time experimenting on a basis of false premises like most inexperienced geniusses."

"I'm much obleeged," I says.

"Not at all. In the first place an author's reputation is the most important ingredient in the recipe for success; he should if possible be well and widely known in advance of publication."

"Well," I says, "as far as my reputation goes I'm well and favorable known west to Flagstaff and south to the Mexican border, and I only been in jail once in my life. They wouldn't of got me then only I took the wrong hoss and he give out on me, dern him!"

But Allingham shaken his head like this wouldn't hardly do.

"You're not notorious enough, Lem—you'll have to depend on tactics. Let me outline a tentative formula: Persuade yourself that you know something the world can scarcely do without, but which nobody else knows. That's called a mission—it isn't difficult to acquire. Then enshrine your thought in a book nobody can get any sense out

of. That'll be your masterpiece. The rest is easy. All you have to do is to find a philanthropic publisher, write a catchy blurb about yourself, hire a press agent and prepare to bask thereafter in the sunrays of success."

"It sounds simple," I says; "what was that blurb writing you mentioned?"

"Oh, just a little account of your career to date and a brief but clever description of your personality. Clever, I mean, in the sense that you must appear shrinkingly modest and yet not so much so as to obscure the basic fact your best deprecatory efforts can't hide, namely, that you're probably the most gripping and intriguing and suspenseful scribe that ever gave the bone-head public a chance to support him by monetary contributions to his vogue."

"Well," I says, "I ain't noways discouraged. Nor I wouldn't have to write no blurb out, I could tell you about myself now. My name is Lem Allen and I'm twenty-four years old come fall and I was born in Oklahoma and I am a singular feller without no responsibilities except my gal back home which I expect to marry when I get me a good stake. Also I got two hosses, a grey and a brown, but I favor the grey a mite more. He is a good pony going on seven year, only he will pitch if he thinks he can get away with it. He don't pitch nothing regular with me.

"I am in good physical condition and weigh around a hundred and forty pounds, being wiry-built and right tough, though my legs is bowed out some from the saddle. I'm right ameable by nature unless they try to ride me, or mebbe once every so often in the morning before my coffee's drank. As for my pers'nal looks, I ain't never depended on them for a living so I managed to git along so far. I ain't what you could call handsome in the face exactly, but I've seen worse favored fellers. Once or twice.

"I reckon that's about all, except that amongst my responsibilities I forgot to mention the check Mudge just give me for my back pay."

Allingham had been lissening feeble to what I was telling him; but when he heard about the check he jumped up right hasty and rubbed his hands together like he craved action.

"Well, well!" he says sparklin', "here we've been wasting our time discussing unimportant abstractions when we've got something concrete to work on. Isn't that just like a couple of literary chaps?"

"I dunno," I says frank, "but I was figuring that as long as you ain't got any money — which I don't reckon you have — I'd best get this check cashed and hand you half of it so we can start on our trip with no advantage in the draw."

At this Allingham looked surprised, sort of; but when he seen I meant what I said he got right cordial and shook me by the hand a time or two.

"That's mighty thoughtful of you, Lem! I can see you're going to learn the author business in short order — you're already getting careless about money."

"How about that plan you was going to ponder out?"

"Well, I've been thinking it over. For the first move I think you'd better make a practise interview with someone, to get your hand in. If you come out all right with it you can concentrate on interviews as we go along and omit descriptions of scenery and so forth, which are always most popular when missing from the text. Do you think you could manage an interview?"

"How can I tell?" I says; "I never tried one."

"Well, the main thing is to keep the subject from getting type-shy. You must inveigle him into talking frank and

free. You must creep up on his intelligence as if you were stalking some wary creature of the woods and ensnare his inmost thoughts by the superior subtlety of your trained mind. If he says something you already know you must write it down with a semblance of intense concentration, but if he lets slip any facts of real importance you must look out at the view to one side in a bored way, tapping your teeth impatiently with your well-sharpened pencil and carefully etching his words on your fallow brain for subsequent transcription. Do you follow me? ”

“No,” I says, “but no matter. Who would you interview if you was me? ”

Allingham thought a minute, then says:

“In my recent trips round the ranch and environs I ran across an old prospector camped near where I sought the lost sheep that time. He said his name was Andrew Jackson — do you know him? ”

“Shore I know him. Everybody knows him — he was here before the Injuns come, so they say. He’s been prospecting all through the territory for years and has usually got a alleged fortune lying in the ground somewheres which he can’t get no kind-hearted investors to help him dig out. Likewise he’s the orneriest and most contrary critter living — if he was drowneded a feller’d have to look upstream for the corpse, I wouldn’t wonder! ”

“He did strike me as being a bit difficult,” says Allingham. “If you interview him successfully I think you might rest assured that your equipment for our task is adequate.”

“Well,” I says, “I ain’t looking forward to it none, but I’ll try a interview on Andrew and see what comes of it.”

“And in the meantime,” suggeded Allingham offhand, “I’ll just take one of your horses and ride into Vegas for supplies. Perhaps I’d better take the check, after you’ve

endorsed it to my order, so I can collect my half of the proceeds and put a stop to the loss of interest I'm suffering at present."

Well, what Allingham said give me a pause. I begun to realize more plain the hazzards of this dangerous life we was starting out on, because with my name on the check there wasn't nothing only moral reasons why Allingham shouldn't take the whole amount of money from the check and spend it on hisself. And while morals is all right in their place it's been one of my experiences that they ain't always a plumb reliable guarantee agin financial errors.

About this time I recollected what Mudge had said he figured would happen to my stake, and the thought come to me that perhaps Allingham had suggedest my interviewing Andrew Jackson so's to git me out'n the way while he went on a time at Vegas. But then I happened to remember also that if I didn't trust Allingham the very first time he wanted to be trusted, how could him and me learn something about each another?

So I quit thinking and wrote my name on the check and give it to Allingham and saddled up the grey for him and the brown for myself and taken a snap-shot camera the Boss owned which Allingham had been using and started for Andrew's claim.

This Andrew Jackson is a pore old feller which has been living by hisself so long he hasn't got no manners left. He acts so important nobody can't tell him nothing. I reckon he ain't just right in the head neither—but p'r'aps I'm running him down because I didn't have no luck in my interview. I always aim to be fair.

When I reached Andrew's camp I found him sitting on the door-sill of his cabin, looking right discouraged.

"I have come to make an interview with you, Andrew," I says.

"Git down!" says Andrew husky, "I ain't saw you for a month of moons. You don't have any whiskey with you, do you?"

So I told him I didn't and give him the makin's and we set smoking peaceable a spell. Then finally Andrew throwed away his cigareet butt and asks:

"What was that you was sayin' about a interview?"

"Well, I'm writing a book, Andrew, and the first step is to get idees from prominent people hereabouts about what they think."

"I don't think," says Andrew, "as a rule. Because they ain't nothin' in this hull dog-blasted local'ty wuth thinkin' about. And I ain't the feller you're lookin' for nohow — the only thing prominent about me at the present instance is my thirst, which is shore workin' this mornin'. You didn't say you had any lick, did you?"

"No," I told him, "I ain't got no time for pleasure. I'm writing a book like I told you. Do you reckon we will have a good grazing season for beef cattle this year, Andrew?"

Andrew looked at me disgusted.

"They used to take prophets and prop 'em up and throw stones at 'em. They let 'em live now, for the most part; but yet it ain't a plumb lukertive line I ain't no prophet."

"Well, lookit here, Andrew," I says impatient. "Why'n't you act rees'nable? If you don't say something kin be printed when I ask you, how am I goin' to get this here interview?"

"It ain't no hair off'n my head if you don't git the interview," he says more cheerful.

So then I figured I'd take a picture of Andrew, because

Allingham says the best interviews are always illustrated with pictures of the fellers involved; but when I aimed the camera Andrew jumped back like he was snakebit and jerked out his gun.

“Hol’ on thar!” he hollers right fierce.

“What’s the matter, Andrew?” I asked him. “It don’t hurt none.”

“Nobody can’t take no pitcher of me,” he says excited. “How do I know how fur it’ll go or who it’ll reach? They’s fellers would ruther git a peek at this face of mine than to meet up with some movin’ pitcher queen or other at first hand.”

What he claimed sounded kind of boastful to me, so I says:

“Them fellers has got right poor judgment, to my way of thinking.”

“Mebbe so,” says Andrew, “but they got doggone good memories.”

I seen it wasn’t of no use to argue, so I begun talking about something else; and as soon as Andrew found I’d give up the notion he got more sociable and told me about his troubles. And I told him about Allingham and the trip me and him was going to make.

“I done met the young feller,” Andrew put in, “he come up here visitin’ most every mornin’ for a spell. I took him round to some of my claims, but he seemed more interested in the ore I had from that new strike I made las’ summer in the Mogollon mountains — the Golden Nuggett, I call it. I wouldn’t wonder if this Allingham and me wouldn’t come to a dicker on that prospect — if he gits aholt of any money.”

Then Andrew started in for to tell me about this claim, the Golden Nuggett, but I wasn’t overly interested. I was

glad, though, to get a sidelight on how Allingham had been spending his time when he let on to be sightseeing. And while Andrew was talking an idee come to me how I could get the interview with him and attend to my own business also.

“Do you keer for a drink, Andrew?” I asks sudden.

Andrew stopped talking and looked at me right earnest.

“Because if you do,” I says, “you’d best throw your saddle onto your hoss and ride into Vegas with me and I’ll guarantee you a time. I got money waitin’ for me there. But you got to give me that interview I was talking about!”

Andrew never said nothing, just jumped up and loped off down the draw after his mare, which is named Sadie. It’s a funny name for a hoss, but then Sadie is funny herself. I dunno how old she is, because she won’t let nobody git close enough to her teeth to find out. Andrew claims it’s only natural for a critter of the feminine gender, but seems like Sadie would be too mature for such foolishness. But mebbe they git wuss as they grow older — I dunno.

When we finally got going I says:

“Now for the interview, Andrew!”

But Andrew looked plumb irr’table.

“What are you talking about — with a drink waiting?” he says. “Giddap, Sadie!”

So I humored him for the time being. It’s always best, when they’re thataway.

CHAPTER IV

A FRIENDLY GAME WITH CARDS

IT was after sundown when me and Andrew got to town and I and Sadie was both fatigged, because all Andrew said on the trail was "Giddap!" and all he done was push the mare on faster than she felt 'twas fittin' to travel. When we finally reached Vegas and couldn't find Allingham nowheres to get my share of the money off him, Andrew begun to act up.

"If I had a stake comin' to me," he says bitter, "they wouldn't be a hole deep enough nor a crack norrow enough to hide it away from me in. Why, I'd taar this town up roots and branches afore I'd go dry on account of a mere failin' to connect with that ornery, thievin' fly-by-night which calls hisself Allingham!"

"Why'n't you be patient the way I am, Andrew?" I says, and then Andrew come back at me with some descriptive matters which I will omit, like Allingham suggested, and we had words and finally somebody come in between us.

When they found out what Andrew was suffering from they led him over to Hicks's Bar and one of the fellers winked at the bartender on account of the pro'bition law and shortly afterwards I left Andrew pacified and started to hunt up Allingham by myself.

I was getting right worrited, because Vegas ain't never a safe place for a feller with money which ain't acquainted there, and Allingham hadn't struck me as one which would

be good at taking keer of himself in a crowd. But if I'd knowed him better I wouldn't of wasted my emotions the way I done.

Finally I found a bartender who claimed he'd seen Allingham a while back, headed for a little game of stud. So I begun to git more worrited yet, because in cards them little games is usually big games. Little is just the way they call them.

"Whereabouts is this game staged?" I asked the feller.

"I ain't right sure," he says, "but you might inquire over to the Saddles saloon. I believe this friend of yours got a check cashed there."

So I busted over to the Saddles hasty, and the more I thought of Allingham gittin' in a game the madder I got. I figured that besides making me ascairt for his safety he didn't have no right to git me all worked up over the well-bein' of my stake. It wa'n't a friendly act, seemed like.

I found him setting cozy in the back room of the saloon, playing in the poker game like I'd suspicioned he'd be doin'. As I come in he riz up and pushed back his chair and stretched hissself.

"That'll be all for the nonce," he says indifferent. Then he seen me and how I was looking at him cold-like, and he was some took aback, I reckon, because he greeted me right hearty.

"I didn't expect you in town so soon, Lem," he says, "but welcome just the same. Did you get your interview with Andrew?"

"No," I says, "I done wasted my time. I hope you used yours profitable."

So he laughed.

"I planned on it, but my plan was disarranged by some strangers who entered the game unexpectedly."

“ Who all was that? ”

“ Four kings,” he says; “ they were held in the last hand — against me.”

Well, sir, I bowed up right there. I figured Allingham had blowed in the whole stake, because it's been one of my experiences that fellers ain't got no property sense when the chips is rattlin'. I brung up the question later and Allingham helt it's because their bump of prudence don't function in the crisis, but I dunno. Seems like they just git plumb shiftless.

I thought o' course this was a case in p'int, but I was mistook, because just as I was fixin' to slip the hackamore off'n my tongue and let Allingham in on my real feelin's, he drawed a roll of bills out'n his pocket and handed them over to me.

“ There's your part of our capital, Lem,” he says, “ mine, I grieve to state, has been sacrificed at the shrine of the fickle goddess.”

Well, it wasn't no news to jubilate over, for a fact. It looked like our chances of takin' a trip was gettin' slimmer as time passed. And my idee in givin' Allingham half the check had been for him to spend it on the tour, not a busted flush. Yet I hadn't made no hard and fast stip'lations to that effect, and he'd been doin' his best to win in the poker game, I figured. So with one thing and another and me sufferin' relief that he hadn't gambled away our last cent I nodded towards the bar and says:

“ Hadn't we better take one? ”

“ It might help,” Allingham admitted, and so we approached the bartender and after winking a time or two give the order.

I took licker and Allingham says: “ Give me the same! ” and then we swallowed and Allingham made a face and says

to the bartender: "That ain't the same — it's even worse!"

"Shish!" says the feller like he was scared somebody'd hear him. "That stuff you're drinkin' is agin the law!"

"Well," I says, "it ought to be, for a fact!"

Then nobody said much for a spell and we had one or two more in the interims of silence.

I ain't no great hand to drink as a rule; not that I get mean or raar round important, but only after a certain number I get so doggoned expensive. Money don't mean no more to me on them occasions than time. I've cost myself a lot of cash thataway off and on — a couple or three hundred dollars total, I reckon, if the truth was known.

It was just so once I got drinking with Allingham in the Saddles saloon. I hadn't had so much money since I holp a feller with a little holdup job down in Oklahoma, when I was younger and less keerful; and I reckon the wealthy feeling must of gone to my head. That or the licker, which was right percolatin' stuff.

So it wasn't no time at all hardly till I was buying drinks for the company, and presently I give Allingham half of what cash I had left so's he could gamble some more, seeing he liked it. That's just how reckless I was getting.

He made some objections at first but I persuaded him it was more sensible for him to have a good time whilst we could afford it, so finally he took up his original plan once more to make a killing in the poker game, and I went out to wrangle Andrew and see if I could get that interview.

I found Andrew where I'd left him, in Hicks's saloon, only now he was setting down at a table with some fellers gathered round laughing fit to kill. He was telling them about his troubles, so he was enjoying hisself also.

When he seen me it reminded him of the grudge he had agin me for not giving him a time like I'd agreed to, and he began to cuss vi'lent till I showed him the money I had and then he quieted down and I become one of the audience.

I figured if I was patient I could get the interview, but whenever I'd mention about it Andrew would start in on a new hard luck story and shut me off. Finally he said plain he'd rather wait till morning when he was finished with business, so I had to set up till all hours and then put him to bed at the hotel where I could keep an eye on him.

In the morning it turned out that his business was still absorbing, as you might say; because when I brought up the interview Andrew says: "Hol' on; I got to git me a drink first. I ain't been so drouthy since Sadie was a colt."

So we traipsed over to the Saddles; but no sooner we got inside than we heard a yellin' and a stampin' from the back room and there I see Allingham settin' where I'd left him the night before, with chips stacked up all round him and the balance of the players glansing at him right jealous.

"How you doin'?" I asked him.

"How's he doin'?" hollers a feller which had been sweating the game. "How's he doin'? He's done made a clean-up! I wouldn't wonder if they was more money layin' there on the table than they is in the Gov'ment mint!"

Allingham was right pale in the face and must of been plumb tired, the way he kept lifting up his eyebrows to get his eyes open.

"My plans worked out this trip, Lem," he says, yawning. "Industry and perseverance bring a sure reward. I guess I'll take a nap now." And with that he laid his head down onto the table and begun to sleep peaceful.

I cashed in the chips and the winnings come to eight

hundred and thirty-two dollars, which with what I had left out'n the original wages check made better'n a thousand altogether. It shore looked like a lot of money for one man to handle.

I seen Allingham was good for a spell of rest and re-cooperation, after the shift of night work he'd done, so I moved over to the bar and bought Andrew a drink of what they kep' there. Andrew called it a eye-opener, though I wouldn't have judged he needed nothing of the kind after he'd had a good look at the winnings. Then me and him went out for the balance of our breakfast.

Andrew didn't say a grate deal during the meal, but every once in so often he'd ask to see the money and then seems like he'd feel better. So I figured I'd be able to get my interview before long. I didn't pester Andrew none, howsomever; I just showed him the roll occasional and let the sight sink into his mind.

But I was wrong agin about gittin' the interview, because no sooner we'd finished at the restaurant than Andrew let on he had a important engagement with a mining sharp he'd met the night before, and left without no more words said. So when I seen I couldn't git him to stay I let him go and went back to where I'd left Allingham.

I found him sitting up able to take a little liquid nourishment, so I drug out the stake he'd win and give it to him. He counted it careful and then split the amount and shoved a half of it at me.

"That's yours, Lem," he says.

"No," I says, "I don't want only what I loaned you."

Allingham seemed right put out.

"No ding-busted author can bully me," he says loud; "I guess I can split fifty-fifty with you if I want to, can't I?"

Well, I didn't want no quarrel with him there in the public's eye, so I give in and took the money. And I begun to figure that mebbe we could get started on our tour now, but just as I was fixin' to sudget it I heard the door creak behind me and seen Allingham looking right attentive acrost my shoulder, his eyes might' nigh wide open.

I swung round and who should I see standin' there but Mudge and a couple of punches from the Bar T ranch?

Mudge was grinning on one side of his mouth, the way he does when he's up to some meanness. He took a step or two towards Allingham and Allingham sat quiet, looking Mudge over sleepy-like.

"Mister Arnold wants to see you, young feller!" says Mudge important. "He's waiting over to the Montezuma House."

Allingham studied a minute with his glanse on the floor like he hadn't heard no words at all, then looked up and says careless: "Thank you, Mudge — there's no answer!"

The punchers sort of snickered and Mudge give a frown and edged up closer.

"Are you goin' over or not?" he hollers vi'lent.

Allingham stretched hissself and yawned, tapping one hand over his mouth.

"To tell you the truth I haven't decided; but I'll take the matter under advisement. I can't promise more, so don't coax me!"

At that the punchers bust out laughing and Mudge unbuckled his cattridge belt and throwed it onto the floor savage.

"You can't make no fool out'n me!" he yells.

"No," says Allingham reflectful, "the good Lord beat me to it." Then he jumped out of his chair quick and stood up to Mudge.

Mudge give a beller and dived for Allingham, and me and the punchers hollered and jumped round so's to get a better view. But we didn't see a grate deal. Before we'd hardly had time to work up our enthusiasms Allingham jabbed Mudge a couple of times in the face as he rushed in and then swang a right from somewheres in behind hisself and caught Mudge smack on the p'int of the jaw.

Well, sir, when that punch landed I figured Mudge must be shore knocked loose from his wishbone. His head took a sort of rainbow curve backwards and never stopped travelin' till it brung up agin the planks of the floor. We watched for him to git up but there wasn't no come-back in his system, at the moment. He jest lay there plumb still and peaceable, like he was waiting for somebody to say it with flowers. So we figured the fight was completed.

The punchers drug Mudge to one side where he wouldn't be in the way, and they was still working over him when Allingham and me left. Which we did as soon as Allingham had received the ovations of them present and got his hand wropped up where it had chipped off a mite agin Mudge's vissage.

CHAPTER V

THE GOLDEN NUGGETT

WELL," I says to Allingham when we had made our eggsits from the Saddles saloon, "if you're supposed to be a invalid at the present writings I'd sure hate to get in a jam with you when you're feeling healthy. The way you treated Mudge anybody'd think you was a fighter."

"I thought so myself once," Allingham says sober. After a minute he went on: "A chap that's looking for trouble usually gets it in time — and in bulk. I got it on the occasion I refer to. Since then I've been more careful who I pick to demonstrate on."

So we didn't say no more about the matter then, but I began to suspect Allingham wasn't such a greenhorn as you'd think from lissening to him talk — because this Mudge was right rugged of a feller and one which a ordinary man wouldn't go out of his way to cross. I don't hardly believe I would have wanted to tackle him myself.

Soon we reached the Montezuma House, where we was heading for, and found the Boss waiting for us. He seemed right pleased to see Allingham.

"What's wrong with your hand?" he asked the first thing.

Allingham smiled like it wasn't much to fret over.

"I'm afraid I was a bit hasty with your messenger. So we quarreled."

At that the Boss looked kind of anxious.

"You don't say! I hope you haven't any other injuries. Mudge is rather a rough and ready customer —"

"He's rough all right," I put in, "but I don't hardly believe this time he was ready. For what happened."

So the Boss looked surprised.

"You don't mean to tell me Mudge got the worst of it?"

"If he don't know by now he's whipped," I says, "it's because he ain't woke up yet. He looked right harmless the last I seen of him."

Then the Boss laughed, kind of. Nor I don't reckon he was grievin' much about what had took place, because Mudge wasn't one which a feller'd cry over on account of his misfortunes.

Then the Boss looked at Allingham reproachful.

"I thought you promised me you were going to rest out at the ranch for a while. Now I hear you're off on a wild goose chase —"

"We're not off yet," Allingham says smiling, "we're just jockeying for a start. But candidly, we did plan a little trip for copy."

"For copy?"

"Yes," says Allingham, and told the Boss how I had decided to be a author and write down the true facts about our adventures in this Western country, and how he had agreed after bein' persuaded agin his best judgment to go along and see I didn't get into no trouble. But he left out how dangerous we was going to act and about this feller Neetsky and all. Mebbe he figured the Boss wasn't acquainted with Neetsky, like I wasn't.

When he'd finished he says apologetic:

"I suppose we should have waited till you returned before setting forth on our Odyssey, but I thought we'd run into you in town here — as we did — and get an opportunity to explain the method in our madness — as I've done. Of course we don't expect to be gone forever — and of course

I'll let you know what happens; so maybe you'll find it in your heart to forgive me for crippling your foreman and stealing your cook and only guest. Perhaps you'll even bestow your blessing on us and wish us luck in our undertaking! "

"You'll probably need it," laughed the Boss. "How are you fixed for money? "

So we told him and he laughed some more and then him and Allingham shook hands and was about to call it a day, when Allingham asks offhanded:

"By the way, how did your mining friend make out? "

"So-so," says the Boss, "nothing startling. I'd like to have you meet him, but he's over at Tecolote for the day — got a hunch on a prospect there."

With that we said *Adiós* and immersed from the Montezuma House. And about then I remembered Andrew and how I hadn't got that interview yet. So I mentioned the facts to Allingham.

"We'd ought not to leave the pore old feller stranded," I says: "just when he's got going good on a bender. Seems like a plumb crool situation for a critter of his years an' habits."

But Allingham didn't seem overly sympathetic.

"What bar do you suppose he's in? " he asks absent-minded.

So I told him about the date Andrew had with a mining man and Allingham begun to look interested.

"I wouldn't be surprised if your altruistic instincts were sound, Lem," he says finally; "it won't do for us to leave a fellow human being in distress when a small loan might make him happy and contented. Let's go and look Andrew up! "

So that's what we done, though it taken us the best part of an hour to locate Andrew.

We found him in the back room of a saloon in Old Town, which is a section infested mostly by Mexicans and dogs. He was sitting at a table with a drink in front of him, looking plumb important and talking loud to one of them slicked-up Mexicans with store clothes on and a little black mushtache like the pictures of handsome villains in gal's novels. He looked right unappetizin' to me, for a fact — although I ain't no hand to hold a man's natural misfortunes agin him. And when we seen Andrew was making friendly talk with the critter we set down at the table with them and Andrew ordered the drinks like he was passing the time of day.

When the bartender turned up Andrew digs out a roll a pitchin' hoss couldn't jump over.

"Seems like the luck has done turned for you, Andrew!" I says surprised.

"I been workin' this mornin'," says Andrew careless. Then he showed us a chunk of ore he had in his pocket. "This here has just interested my friend Mr. Garnashone Sena, which you all kin observe acrost the table from me, to the extent of a couple of hundred dollars."

"Encarnacion it is my name!" put in the Mexican peckish.

"No matter," says Andrew good-humored, "you done paid your money. Here's hopin' you ain't stuck!"

So we drunk to that idee, though as far as my feelings went the Mexican could of been stuck a whole lot and I wouldn't have shed no teardrops, as the feller says.

"Just what was it you bought, Mr. Sena?" asked Allingham polite. "Not that ore, I don't imagine?"

"Not that but consid'able more like it!" Andrew busted

in, before the Mexican could say something. "Carnation's done purchased a option on half interests in my claim the Golden Nuggett. The other half I'm holdin' agin all offers."

When Allingham heard this he looked sort of hacked, and I asked:

"Whereabouts is the claim located? "

"I already told you, yesterday," says Andrew, "down in the Mogollons. And Nation here, who's a lawyer and a man of jedgment, thinks — "

"No, no," breaks in the Mexican uneasy, "I did not say I think — I hope! "

Allingham was looking at the Mexican careful.

"Since you're a lawyer, Mr. Sena, perhaps you're acting for some client in this matter? "

But Sena just shook his head doubtful and spread his hands out innercent the way they does.

"It may prove a good investment, *señor* — I hope! "

So then Allingham seen he'd got off on the wrong foot, because anybody which can extract information from a Mexican by asking questions could set up as a detecative right now. And before he could figure out something else the Mexican got up and bowed ornamental to each of us and said, "*Adiós!*" and went out'n the saloon.

Allingham glansed tactful towards Andrew and asked:

"Were you serious just now when you stated that you decline to part with what you still own of your claim? "

"No," says Andrew, "I wa'n't."

Well, Allingham looked right took back for a minute, not knowing Andrew as well as he might. Then he got his 'breath and says brisk:

"Good! That being the case, I can offer you two hundred dollars for a six-months option on your remaining interest in the Golden Nuggett."

But Andrew laughed harsh.

"You kin offer me more'n that if you ain't blowed your recent winnin's reckless. Don't talk foolish! "

At this Allingham got right red in the face and hollers:

"Why, the dad-gummed hole in the ground ain't worth any more now than it was this morning, is it? Nor it hasn't increased in value four times since a week ago when you offered me a half interest for fifty dollars, has it? "

"Yep," says Andrew, "it has."

So Allingham leaned back like he was fatigged.

"Perhaps you'll explain the miracle? "

"It ain't no miracle," Andrew says, "it's a probullum in addition. And the reason you got to get your mathematics to work if you're goin' to git in on the Golden Nuggett is because I don't need a stake now as bad as I did before. You forgot I got money now! "

Well, Allingham was gettin' right riled, but it didn't do him no good because Andrew had him in a tight and they both knowed it. So after arguring back and forth for a half hour or better Andrew let on he'd sell an option on the half interest he still held, for five hundred dollars, and five thousand to be paid as purchase money if the option was took up within six months.

I bust out laughing when I heard this — it seemed right ridiculous. But when Allingham took Andrew up on the prop'sition and said it was a go, I quit laughing because I could see it was li'ble to develop into a matter involving consid'able cash money.

I didn't say nothing, however; just waited patient while Allingham chased Andrew off to a notary to get the papers made out.

Then Allingham turned to me.

"If you'll hand me two hundred and fifty dollars, Lem,"

he says casual, "there won't be any more formalities to go through with till we see Andrew again."

"You ain't gone crazy, have you?" I asked him.

Well, Allingham looked plumb disappointed.

"Crazy?" he says injured-like. "Crazy — to want my pardner to share in the good luck that's come into my life?"

"Hah — hah!" I says sarcastic. "Good luck!" Then I begun to think what a triflin', immoral thing it was to throw good money away which some pore feller could of used to buy bread an' meat with and I says: "Lookit here, Allingham, I didn't make no objection when you risked a half of our capital in that card game, because in the first place I didn't know about it till too late and in the second place you had a gamblin' chance to make some money out'n the game. But this here projeck is different. They ain't no chance for profits at all. And we ain't in a position to give no sum like five hundred dollars to charity — or even to Andrew, if it comes to that. Whatever made you get caught up in this kind of a jam is beyond me, and that's the gospel truth!"

Allingham was movin' his glass round on the table in a little circle and watching the operation pensif. When he seen I'd done made my talk he looked up solemn and says:

"I'm glad you're willing to discuss the affair, Lem. I understand you find yourself in a quandary as to the nature of the considerations which moved me to accept Andrew's generous offer — let me resolve your puzzlement. Firstly, you must concede that it's better to sink a portion of our stake in a respectable form of investment such as real property than lose it otherwise piecemeal — as we'd be sure to do sooner or later. Secondly, if someone should happen to discover pay ore in the Golden Nuggett we'd

find ourselves in a noble strategic position. Can you deny it? ”

“ I don’t aim to,” I says, “ all I got to remark is, I ain’t interested in the prop’sition.”

When I says this Allingham got a plumb sad look on his face like he’d lost a friend or something. Then he hove a couple or three sighs, with a pause in between each one. When I asked him what was the trouble he says mournful:

“ Nothing, Lem — nothing. Only it hurts me when you refuse the first real danger we’ve encountered, on the very threshold of our enterprize. Perhaps I’ve tried you too far though, to begin with; because while many lightheartedly risk physical or moral disaster it takes a true hero to look poverty in the face and smile. Ah, well, I can go it alone — to the extent of what money I have left anyway! ”

Then he ordered the drinks in a die-away voice, smiling like it was hard but had to be did courageous. And after we’d had one or two more shots of Mexican licker I begun to git sad also. It looked as if our tour was goin’ to be turned into a mournin’ bee, an’ the idee didn’t make no hit with me when I thunk of it. Then I begun to think, well, mebbe there was something in what Allingham said about our having decided to act dangerous and me not living up to the prescription. And I seen that it was a right good chance to prove out the plan we’d made, because there’s no two ways about it, puttin’ money in some other feller’s mine is about as reckless a move as you could figure out. So what with one thing and another finally I begun to give way and says:

“ I reckon if we was to contribute to Andrew’s drive, like you sudgested, we’d still have enough money to make a start on our tour with.”

Then I picked two hundred and fifty dollars off my roll

and shoved it over towards Allingham. But he put up his hand like to push me off.

"No, no!" he says. "I don't want you to go into this out of pity, against your better judgment. Misery loves company, it's true, but it prefers good company if possible. And how do I know your pleasant disposition won't be ruined if it should happen that ill-luck greets this venture?"

"I reckon we got a right good chance to make a lot of money," I says encouragin'; "thousands and thousands, mebbe. I wouldn't wonder if we was cheatin' pore old Andrew — takin' his treasure for a mere pittans this way. I'm chock-full with enthusiasm, for a fact!"

Well, would you believe it, Allingham acted as if he thought I was lyin' and it taken me a lot of time and sev'el drinks before I could get him to accept them bills. I declare, I never seen nobody so plumb obstinate about takin' what he wanted in my life.

But finally he give in and says:

"If you won't have No for an answer I suppose I must let you in on the deal." Then he laughed and adds: "You're a pretty good fellow, Lem!"

"I'm a dern fool, you mean, I reckon!" I says short.

But Allingham just says, "What's the difference?" and counted the bills I'd give him and put them in his pocket and then riz up cheerful and drug me out to buy supplies for the trip we was going to take.

In addition to the supplies Allingham bought tobacco and a teethbrush, but I had plenty of smokin' so I didn't have to buy nothing.

Later we met Andrew and got the option papers and Allingham give Andrew the five hundred dollars. I wanted to get the interview with Andrew, specially as he couldn't claim now he wasn't prominent with all that cash in his

clothes, and Andrew wanted to buy some drinks; but finally we compromised on doing neither. So Andrew said he believed he'd go over to the hardware store and get him some false teeth like Allingham's and Allingham got kind of riled and so we left Andrew and his money and went over to the depot to watch the westbound train come in.

We found the train was late, so we set up on the porch of the local Harvey House waiting for it to come. This partic'lar hotel is a right expensive place and I would have rather set somewheres else so nobody could think we was acting proud on account of having money, but Allingham says No. For the benefit of the management, he says, let us stay where we was, because there was a lot of advertisement for a hotel in catering to only the smartest people.

"Well," I says, "we can shore qualify as bein' smart, because we've spent mighty nigh a whole day with negotiable cash in our pockets and we've got some on it left yet."

So Allingham didn't say nothing for a spell.

"How about that itinery you was mentionin'?" I asked finally.

Allingham looked dreamy-like up and down the tracks.

"Don't let's bother about it now. Doubtless it will come to us at the psychic moment. In the meantime let's enjoy to the full our ignorance of what's going to happen to us next."

He sat back in his chair and lit a cigareet and I could tell by his looks he was fixin' to talk, because he looked like he was thinking of something to eat and couldn't decide what it would be exactly. But just as he was opening his mouth to begin and I was glansing up the track to see if the train had come in sight yet he sat up straight and whispers, "Holy Moses!" like he was surprised.

I looked round quick and all I seen was a gal walking towards us along the porch.

“ What struck you? ” I asked Allingham curious.

“ Dumbhead! ” he says soft, like he was prayin’. “ Look what’s coming towards us! ”

“ I am,” I says, “ it’s a gal.”

“ A girl! Why, you poor strabismic creature — it’s a vision! ”

So I didn’t say no more then, because we’d had right smart of drinks during the day and sometimes a feller gets funny idees about what he’s seein’ after he’s had so much. Nor I didn’t do nothing for the time being only watch the gal while she walked apast us into the hotel without turning her eyes in our direction. And just then we heard Number Nine train which we was waiting for whistle up the track and seen her headlights swing around the curve to eastward.

CHAPTER VI

THE PSYCHIC MOMENT

IN the last chapter I stopped right in the midst of where we seen a gal, which Allingham claims was a mistake because he says talking about some gal is the one best bet in the manufacturing of a best-seller book. He says if he was me he would set down and make an attractif pen-picture of this gal. Well, I ain't no hand at drawring though if it comes to a showdown I can do better with a sof' pencil than a pen; but mebbe on the whole I better tell what the gal looked like instead.

Even at that I'm afeared I'm not goin' to be any too good, because I ain't had no great amount of practise sizing gals up. To tell the truth I ain't never been overly much pestered with them. But I can figure out a man or a hoss about as well as the next feller, and it's been one of my experiences that if they're wide between the eyes and have sens'tif nostrils and hold their heads up eager they're clean-bred and sound as a rule. That was this here gal — a thoroughbred if ever I seen one. And she had a plumb peaseful look onto her face and a wrinkle at one end of her mouth like she could take a joke.

I've been trying to rec'lect what her clothes was like but I disremember, except that they were mostly white with some black. But I'm here to say that this queen from Sheba they brag on as a high-class dresser couldn't of been neater looking nor more respectable attired; nor if she'd

bought her duds at Tiffany's where Allingham claims they sell the most fashionable wimmin's wear they is.

Well, to git back to where we was, after Allingham and me had heard the train whistling from down the track we riz up and were moving toward the platform when the gal I've been talking about came out of the hotel and begun looking around like she was expecting to see somebody.

Then when she seen us she come forrard and says:

"Can either of you gentlemen tell me if this is the Colorado Flyer — and how long it stops here? "

So Allingham pulled off his hat and made a right graceful bow.

"I'm a stranger like yourself, madam! My friend and I are visitors, slightly interested in mining hereabouts. We're making but a brief stay and therefore know nothing about the trains — except that ordinarily they're late. . . . However, I'd be delighted to make inquiries for you! "

"I wish you would! " said the gal, looking at him funny like she thought he was lying, which he was.

Just then a feller ingaged by the hotel began beating on the gong and hollers: "Twenty-five minutes for supper! The Flyer stops twenty-five minutes! "

"This must be the train you want," Allingham says helpful, "and it stops twenty-five minutes if that industrious young man can be believed."

The gal sort of smiled and Allingham looked right pleased with himself, though he hadn't done nothing much only listen to the feller with the gong, fur as I could see.

Then Allingham drew a deep breath and says soothing:

"Madam, I'd rather lose my inalienable American birth-right, a chance to be rich, than have you think myself and friend presumptuous, but if our humble presence at the dinner table would not offend I'd be glad to offer you our

personal protection during the next twenty-five minutes. . . . We are now in the wildest section of the Santa Fé system and you can't be too careful! "

The gal looked at him a minute as if she wasn't sure whether to laugh or git irr'tated, then says cool:

" Thanks so much — but since, as you've observed, we're strangers in Las Vegas, perhaps we'd better remain so. . . . Ah, there's the friend I've been expecting! "

With that she waved her hand cordial and walked to where a young feller in one of them city ridin' suits with knee pants was getting off a hoss, and Allingham and me was left by ourselves.

" Well," I says, " we can't do no good here. Let's go! "

But Allingham was staring dazed-like in the direction where the gal had gone.

" She didn't say 'twas a relative, did she? " he asks hopeful.

" No," I says, " friend was the word she used."

" He's not much to look at. I imagine she made the rendezvous from pity."

" Mebbe they're ingaged to be married," I sugged; " that often makes a difference."

So then Allingham uttered a noath which I will omit and we went over to the short order lunch-room the Harvey House runs, and ordered a snack.

Allingham was right silent during the meal and I figured he was studying about our itinery.

" Where do you reckon we best head for on this tour of ourn? " I asked finally, and Allingham looked at me like he didn't git me.

" Hasn't the psychic moment came yet to decide on our itinery? " I asks: " To speak plain language, what do we do next? "

“ Oh! ” says Allingham. “ Are you still worrying about that? ”

“ Yes,” I says, “ it’s a matter in which I am gratefully interested.”

“ We’ll get on the Colorado Flyer when she pulls out,” he says short. “ Now don’t bother me — I’m busy.”

With that he begins eating industrious, but I wasn’t satisfied.

“ What’ll we do with our hosses and the supplies we’ve bought? ”

“ I’ll wire Arnold from the train — he can take ’em out to the ranch and keep ’em till we get back.”

“ But I ain’t noways convinsed that we’d ought to give up our idee of a hossback tour and hop this train! ”

Allingham laid down his knife and fork and looked at me severe.

“ Lem,” he says, “ that girl we saw was dressed for traveling. I’ve deduced from her appearance and the questions she asked that she’s going out on the Flyer. Would you let a helpless female wander through the wildest part of these United States without a cavalier or two to look after her? ”

“ I’ve already told you this Western country ain’t nigh as wild as it’s depicted,” I come back. “ They don’t hardly ever shoot somebody here in New Mexico without good reason. And besides, mebbe that feller the gal met will go along and look out for her! ”

“ In a riding suit? ”

Well, I could see by now what was on Allingham’s mind. The gal we’d saw had took the place of the psychic moment we’d been waiting for, and it made me kind of riled.

“ What do you want to let a glimp at a gal knock you off’n your balance thataway for? ” I asked heated.

"Why'n't you be temperance about wimmin the way I am? . . . I kin always take 'em or leave 'em alone. . . . Another thing, we don't know where the gal's headed for! "

At this Allingham sank his forrid on his hand tired-like and says:

"What difference does our objective make, Lem? Man is here today and gone tomorrow! "

"That may be," I says, "but as fur as I'm conserved seems like I'd feel easier if I knowed in advance where I was to be gone to."

"You're not the first to express the wish," says Allingham more cheerful; "it's a common by-product of human conceit. But to dispose of the question of our immediate destination, let's leave it to luck in the person of this youthful Hebe who's waiting on us! "

So I said I was agreeable, because it didn't seem like they was nothing else to do. Then Allingham called over the Harvey House gal which was drawring our coffee.

"My young and attractive friend," he says, "we're taking the Flyer westward and we can't decide where to alight. When you consider the local stations that lie along the route of the Santa Fé, which pops most promptly into your vivacious mind? "

"Holbrook," says the gal, "because my train was stalled there once on account of a hot-box. And of all the ornery, God-forsaken, one-horse, jawhawk burgs I ever see that there cemetary carries my money! "

"Why, I thought it was a famous shipping center for the Arizona cattle country! " says Allingham surprised.

"I don't see how the cattle stand for it then, unless on account of their hope to be sent soon to the slotter-house. If they was Mexican steers they'd have started a revolution before now and I wouldn't blame them neither! "

So Allingham wiped his hands on his handkercher and bowed pleasant.

"After that heartfelt tribute from a native daughter," he says, "we would be ungrateful if we did less than visit the interesting community you mention. We will leave for Holbrook at once."

"God be with you," says the gal; "you'll shore need comp'ny! "

So we left the lunch counter and started towards the train. As we were walking along Allingham begun for to talk.

"Now then, Lem, here's where you can enlarge your knowledge of human nature so that sympathy will well from your breast and sentimentality from your writings. . . . There isn't a town in the world unattractive enough to rouse such bias in the bosom of a young girl by just looking at it — there's heart-interest connected with Holbrook for that maiden, you may be sure. Perhaps that was where she received the telegram saying her lover was wounded in the shooting affray; or perhaps that's where her fiancé failed to get the well-earned raise from the firm and had to put off the wedding another year. Who knows? "

"I do," I says, "and it wasn't nothing like you think. The gal was just loading you. She's been married to Jasper Horn of the Vegas Drug Company for going on three years, and she s never been a hundred miles from this here railroad station in her life. I don't reckon she ever saw Holbrook."

Instead of bein' grateful for me puttin' him right, Allingham seemed right hacked.

"Lem," he says, "you're too confoundedly matter-of-fact. You'll never be a great author till you learn to disregard facts. Nothing is further from Art than facts — unless it be figures."

"We better be gittin' on the train," I says, because I was getting fed up with Allingham's conversation. I'm right patient, as I've mentioned before, and I can listen as well as the next man; but it's my idee talk hadn't never ought to be a no limit game. Besides, I never let on I was a great author, as yet.

"We'll get Pullman seats," says Allingham; "we don't make Holbrook till seven-thirty tomorrow morning and these day coaches aren't fit for a white man to travel in, let alone a popular author and his loyal coadjutor, which is me."

"Do you think I could hold out as a popular author?" I asks. "You didn't talk thataway a minute ago!"

So Allingham looked at me funny.

"Seems to me my first reference was to a great author. There's a lot of room in between the two. . . . But let that pass—you're popular with me, anyway. . . . I haven't told you about my moods, have I?"

"No," I says, "you ain't."

"I'd better—because I get a mood every so often. I've got one now, as a matter of fact, and it manifests itself by my not being able to stand any strangers near me. I suppose if a stranger were to accost me I'd just about knock him down and jump on him."

"Speaking of strangers," I says, "there's that gal we seen on the hotel porch. She's kissing her friend good-bye and climbing on the train."

"Yes," says Allingham savage, "I was watching them."

Then he uttered another oath. I declare, I never seen him so blasphemious before.

CHAPTER VII

IN ROUT

WE clumb on the westbound and chose a seat a little behind where the stranger gal was sitting. Then we set quiet a spell watching the sun slide down behind the Pecos range to the north and the sky all pink and green and red like this tooty-fruity ice cream. It was right purty of a sight and I begun to feel lonesome and holler inside, because I knowed it wasn't going to last a grate while. And I felt as if I was going to miss the old ranch and the stillness of the mesa and my two hosses and even Andrew Jackson. He wasn't such a bad old feller, I figured, once he was absent.

Allingham had a far-away look on his face and I thought mebbe he was feeling about like I was, till he says:

"Lem, my erstwhile violent mood has changed to a species of hunger."

"You should have ate more in the lunch room," I told him; "we won't get no more vittils till morning."

"I'm speaking of spiritual hunger," he says impatient, "I'm not myself this evening."

"No," I says, "you ain't for a fact; and I've been meaning to mention it to you when I got a chance. Not that I mind a feller taking a drink now and then, even of pro'bition whiskey. Nor I ain't no hand to tell nobody what's best for them, as a rule; because in the first place they won't believe you and in the second place if they do they'll hold their subsequent errors agin you like ycu was to

blame for them. But I've been plumb worried over you all day — you've been right simple off an' on, and that's the truth."

"All of which is highly interesting and important," says Allingham, "but not germane. As I was saying when you interrupted me, I've a species of soul hunger which appears as a craving for communication with someone better and nobler than myself. If I could find such an one, improbable as that contingency seems —"

"Why don't you go and talk to that stranger gal?" I asked, because I'd noticed how he was glancing at her careful every once in so often.

Allingham sighed heavy.

"She's turned me down once. Whereas you," he adds encouraging, "haven't suffered even a single rebuff as yet."

So I studied a minute.

"I'll make a dicker with you," I says. "If you'll give me your word you won't touch nothing only beer for the balance of the trip I'll go and make a talk to the girl."

"You're on!" Allingham agreed prompt, "and good luck be with you!"

"I ain't never had no luck, so I done learnt how to git along without it," I says, and with that I roached up my hair with one hand and walked up the aisle to where the gal was.

She was sitting still, with her finger stickt in between the leaves of a book, looking out of the window at Glorieta Mountain, which the train was climbing on the up grade. When I come nigh and stopped beside of her she turned and looked at me inquiring.

"Would you mind if I addressed a few friendly remarks to you, ma'am?" I says polite.

"I'd be glad to have company," she returnt prompt;
"won't you sit down? "

So that's what I done.

"I would of sot before," I says, "only I was scairt. I ain't used to talking to stranger gals."

At that the gal smiled, kind of.

"That's easily arranged — we'll be friends instead of strangers. What would you like to talk about — anything in especial? "

"No, ma'am, just in good humor like. . . . I reckon mostly I just wanted to make your acquaintance. My name is Lem Allen and I'm a nauthor at the present."

"What kind of an author, Mr. Allen? "

"A novel author, ma'am," I says.

When I says this the gal looked at me funny like she thought I was loading her, but when she seen I was serious she asked:

"I see — and are you engaged in writing now? "

"No, ma'am — not exactly," I says, some hacked; "least-ways I ain't signed no regular contract. But I been corresponding with a gal in Oklahoma for going on three years and I reckon we'll be married when I get me a stake."

"Oh — that's nice. But I mean — are you doing any novels just now? "

"Yes, ma'am," I says, "I'm writing up a tour I'm making with a friend of mine, a feller by name of Allingham which you spoke to on the hotel porch at Vegas and setting a few seats back in this here car at the present moment."

I put this in because I figured mebbe the gal would ask me to fetch Allingham up so's he could get to talk with her. But she didn't seem interested.

So then a idee come to me.

"I'm figuring on making interviews with prominent

people I meet and putting down what they say they think. And I brung a snap-shot camera along to take their pictures with. I would like to make an interview with you, ma'am, and get a picture if I can."

"Oh, my goodness — no!" says the gal as if she was shockt. "I was too carefully brought up to think of that. One of the first things I learned was never to give my picture to handsome young men."

"I ain't handsome," I says.

"Then you must be interesting. All young men are either one or the other — and the interesting ones are the most dangerous, they say!"

"I ain't dangerous only when I'm riled," I says; "I'm right peaceable by nature."

Then the gal looked out of the window and coffed at her handkercher once or twice. So I wondered if she was West for her health, but decided not, because she had a good color in her face and was built otherwise like a quarter-hoss for speed and wind, though not gaunt hardly any.

So then presently I says:

"If I can't get a picture, mebbe I can make a interview?"

"Oh," she says modest, "I'm hardly prominent enough."

"I'm satisfied," I says; "they ain't many prominent people on the train anyhow, I don't reckon."

"In that case," she says quick, "perhaps it'll be enough if I give you an interview without words, like the song."

Then she laughed pleasant and I figured mebbe 'twas a funny song she was meaning so I says Ha! a couple or three times for to be sociable. And about then I happened to look back where Allingham was sitting and noticed he was making motions to me with his hands and face. But I

didn't know exactly what he was trying to signify so I pretended not to see him.

Then before I knowed what he was fixing to do he got up and walked apast where we was sitting and got a drink of water and then come back and sort of stopped by our seat and stood there smiling ingrashuningly.

I was about to ask him why he didn't set down, because I knowed that was what he wanted, but just then the stranger gal says to me:

"Isn't it dreadful, Mr. Allen, how crowded these trains are? Why, two friends can't enjoy a few moments chat without being interrupted!"

With that Allingham dispersed his smile and glansed at me plumb vicious and walked on apast and kicked me in the ankle so's I had to hold on to it to keep from hollering. I was shore glad he'd promised to quit drinking.

"Well," I says when I'd got my breath, "I reckon I'd best be getting back to my friend. He ain't feeling right peart tonight."

"Nothing serious, is it?" asked the gal casual.

"I dunno," I says, because I wasn't going to tell her about the drinks Allingham had taken. I've noticed one thing, gals don't never like fellers to enjoy drinking. Seems like they figure we'd ought to git more pleasure from the intoxication of their presents. Or mebbe they jest judge it's money wasted, I dunno.

"Well, if you must go!" says the gal then; "but tell me — wouldn't you like to know something about me; my name — where I'm going?"

"Yes, ma'am," I says, "I'd like for to know right well. But although I wasn't brung up so plumb keerful — bein' beat up, as you might say, mostly — still I was learnt

early that curiosity ain't a gift should be showed off reg'lar in company."

The gal looked at me for a minute right friendly.

"My name's Mary Hallock," she says without no more excuses, "my home's in Philadelphia, and I'm getting off at Holbrook —"

She stopped sudden because I couldn't help but give a startle when she let on her dest'nation was the same place we was headed for.

"Why, what in the world's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing," I says, "only it give me a turn like — three people getting off at Holbrook the same day!"

Well, she colored up and for a minute I was afeared she was goin' to git riled, but she depressed her feelin's and says slow:

"Tell me — do you mean that you and Mr. Allingham are leaving the train at Holbrook?"

"Yes, ma'am," I says, "that's what we planned on doing."

Then before she could say something more I begun telling her about how the idee of the tour had come up and about our living dangerous and leaving details to the psychic moment and that gal at the lunch counter and how it had been settled finally we was to git off at Holbrook. And by the time I'd finished the stranger gal was restin' easy once more and wrinklin' up the corner of her mouth like she didn't mind what happened.

"So you haven't planned your movements beyond Holbrook?" she asked museumly.

"No, ma'am," I says, "not as yet."

"Well, I've been more forehanded. I'm making quite an ambitious tour overland, south by the mail roads two hundred miles or more to a little town called Alma, where

I stop for a short time, then south again to Silver City and the railroad. I suppose you know the country? ”

“ Right well,” I says, “ and I’m here to say that when you’ve made your voyage you will have passed through the finest stretch of homespun country these United States boasts. It’s plumb indigenous.”

Then I got up to leave, because what the gal had told me kind of worried me. I was wonderin’ what Allingham would have to say about it when I told him and how ’twould affect our plans. I’d heard tell that when a wumman walked in by the door peace flew out’n the window, though I never took no stock in them sayin’s. But I begun to think, mebbe they’s somethin’ in this one after all!

So I shook hands with the gal and went back to where Allingham was sitting, but before I could make out to pass him the information I’d got he looked at me bitter and busted out:

“ I’ve been harboring a serpent in my bosom, I see! Blow, blow, thou wintry wind; no matter how sharp thy teeth are thou’ve got nothing on a man’s ingratitude! ”

Well, sir, it got to me under the saddle, him talking thataway, and I bowed up right there.

“ Lookit here, Allingham,” I says, “ I ain’t harpied none about your being ascairt of that gal and sickin’ me on to make up to her, nor yet kicking me in the ankle till I got a lump the size of a neagle’s egg, nor acting for the last hour or so like I’d pisened your only survivin’ dotter, but it’s the plumb truth I’m fed up with this mood business — if that’s what you want to call it. It’s beginning to taste of the kag to me.”

So with that Allingham dropped off his mood and laughed right natural.

“ You’re right, Lem — though I’m afraid you’re lack-

ing some in the finer sensibilities. . . . However, suppose we compromise on dismissing the subject and mapping out our itinerary? ”

So we got out the Santa Fé time-table and looked at the map.

“ Fortune favors us,” says Allingham after studying it a spell, “ look where the Mogollon mountains are, almost directly south from Holbrook with the little hamlet of Alma nestling at their feet! What’s to hinder our heading that way and taking a look at the Golden Nuggett claim? ”

I reckon I must of give a grone about then because Allingham looked up inquiring.

“ You aren’t in pain, Lem? ”

I was on the edge of tellin’ him how that gal was fixin’ to go to Alma but then I happened to think mebbe that wouldn’t have no good effects in the circumstances, so I just says:

“ It’s a hard trip and li’ble to be full of irr’tations. Between us and Alma lays a few hundred miles of the least civilized and most unappetizin’ country in the States of Arizona and New Mexico.”

But Allingham didn’t seem discouraged none.

“ I’ve heard of Alma,” he says; “ if my information was dependable we can’t consider our educations complete till we’ve been there.”

“ I dunno as I want any more education,” I says; “ it’s been one of my experiences that fellers with too much education ain’t got time to earn their livings. They’re too busy sprinkling their minds with cool and refreshing thoughts.”

But Allingham wasn’t lissening. After a minute he says absent minded:

“ I wonder what means of transportation we’d better employ? ”

Well, I could see plain by now that he'd made up his mind to get down to where Andrew's prospect was at, and I wondered if mebbe he was figuring that there might be money in the option we'd bought after all. I thought it likely, because I'd begun to take notice that once you got behind the smoke screen of words Allingham throwed out to cover his thoughts with they was often a idee hid away underneath, where it couldn't be easy located.

I was still uneasy about the fact that the gal was headed the same way, but they wasn't nothing I could do about it but keep quiet on the subject till Allingham got wind of the misfortune, and leave the rest to luck.

So I says:

"They used to be a stage line from Holbrook to Springer-ville, and from there we could travel hossback down the valley of the Frisco to Alma. It will cost a slug of money, but I've been writin' steady on my novel book, so mebbe by that time we could cash in on the results."

At this Allingham looked up surprised.

"You mean you've actually recorded events as they've been happening? "

"Shore," I says, "I'm mighty nigh up to date as she stands."

So I showed him what I had wrote down and he read it over careful.

"What do you think of it? " I asked him.

"I think for one thing your spelling is atrocious," he says prompt, "to say nothing of the style and punctuation. I'll have to get my blue pencil into action, I fancy. As it stands your stuff might get by on the puzzle page, but nowhere else. It would be too great a tax on the patience of the average reader."

"What kind of a reader is that? " I asked him.

So Allingham looked pleased, because he had a chance to explain something.

"The average reader," he says, "is an apocryphal character responsible for more futile fiction than the popular magazines even. He is allegedly the arbiter of public taste, being shouldered by editors with the responsibility for what they print. It is said by those in his confidence that he likes literature of two kinds only: the cream puff and firecracker brands. The first species of confection he can bite into easily — having gums but no teeth — and get his visage all mussed up pleasant with hardly an effort. The second sort of yarn, which explodes at the end with an imitation noise and sends up numbers of pretty sparks, is conceded to fill the poor creature with a momentary excitement and make him think he's alive instead of moribund. I forgot to say that he is usually a woman, and likes its literature —"

"This here yarn of mine ain't literchure," I says.

"No," says Allingham, "it's got that much in its favor. . . . Among other faults in your narrative, you don't pause often enough for breath."

"I'm right long-winded," I come back. "Once I run eight mile from a baar, till I found out he was headed the other way. But it showed what I could do if I had to."

"You don't have to. Writing is no longer an endurance contest — though there are still some authors who deem length a more important dimension than breadth. But fast work is the rule. A quick start and a strong finish and no loafing in between are the orders of the day and the astute intellects that attempt the arduous task of making books profitable."

"Well," I says, "I will bear that in my mind."

"Do. . . . I find that you possess a homely wit, if the

adjective isn't too mild — sometimes it borders on the hideous. Then too, as I've warned you before, you have a habit of leaning too far forward in the direction of veracity, which is fatal. Truth is so much stranger than fiction, as a rule, that if you don't use your imagination more and your memory less you will be accused of lying."

"I will have right on my side," I says.

"That's of no interest to anyone but yourself — and your fiancée perhaps, if you lose money by it. . . . By the way, did you learn that girl's name and where she came from? "

But I didn't give him no satisfaction.

"I will tell you some other time," I says, "when the psychic moment arrives. I'm tired out now from lissening to so much information all at once."

CHAPTER VIII

A TOUCH OF NATURE

THE train was late for Holbrook so we got breakfast on the dining car, to be on the safe side. Allingham seemed in a sort of fluster and kept looking at everyone who came in, to see if he could get a glimpse of the stranger gal, I reckon; but she never showed up. So finally he begun lookin' out'n the window at the Arizona scenery driftin' by.

"The suburbs of Holbrook aren't exactly congested, are they, Lem?" he says reflectful.

"No," I admitted, "air and desert land is the chief products of the region, and they ain't any great amount of money in neither. That's likely why folks is scarce hereabouts."

So Allingham studied a minute.

"You've never been in California, I take it?"

"I ain't," I says.

"I thought not, because if you had you'd realize what wonders can be accomplished by the commercial instinct working on the raw materials of sand and air."

"How is that did?" I asked curious.

"By applying water to the land and heat to the air," he says absent-minded. "I wonder what's keeping that girl in bed so long — she ought not to be missing the first rare blush of morning's dew-clad face —"

"Mebbe she's packin' up to git off," I says, because I'd figured during the night I'd best tell Allingham about the

gal's plans. I knowed he'd find out soon anyhow and he might think I'd been keeping something from him if I didn't reveel what I'd heard.

So when I says what I did he opened his eyes right wide and stared at me surprised.

"Getting off? . . . You mean —"

"If you hadn't been so full of words yesterday evenin'," I explained, "I'd of told you that's she's planning to light at Holbrook, like us."

Well, sir, Allingham's teeth all showed at once and he got right red in the face with pleasure. It give me a turn to see how irrel'vent he was gittin'. That's gal's goin' to be a torment to us yet, I says to myself. But I didn't say nothing out loud, only to tell him the gal's name and where she was from and about her heading for Alma.

At that Allingham drew a deep breath and says:

"Mary Hallock! Mary — it's a beautiful name!"

"Yes," I says, "it'll do. My gal's name is Liza."

But Allingham wasn't lissening.

"And she's going to Alma! . . . It's fate, Lem — fate!"

"Well," I says, "you can't change the situation by calling it hard names. We got to make the best of it."

So I started eating and made out a right good breakfast — eggs an' ham an' a small steak an' fried potatoes an' rolls an' coffee. And then seems like I felt less discouraged. It's funny how often a feller kin fool hissself as to his prospects, by eatin' thataway.

Allingham was looking out of the window in the meanwhile, and now seems like what he seen there didn't irritate him like it had before. Then all of a sudden he begin mutt'ring to hissself like he was plumb daft.

"Into the nether wilds," he mumbled, "back to the arms of nature — across the billowing desert, out of man's

ken and the vices and meannesses of men with only the voice of Mother Earth in our ears — ”

Just then the engine give a screech and the train begun to slow down and we made a jump for our seats where I'd left the snap-shot camera and Allingham had left his personal supplies. But still we didn't see nothing of the gal and I begun to hope she'd been loading me about getting off.

The train took on water at Holbrook so it stopped sev'el minutes for the refreshments and we had a chance to look around and size up things. And all we seen out of the ordinary was a big grey automobile covered with alkali dust and standing by the platform with a young feller in a yaller dustcoat at the wheel.

“ I wonder if that's the car we take? ” says Allingham excited.

“ Not unless they's been grate changes made in the accomodation of towerists since I was here last,” I says.

But Allingham had stepped forrard and says to the driver of the car:

“ What's the chances of going south in your bus, my friend? ”

“ None — for you,” says the feller short-like, and about then I noticed where the stranger gal was coming towards us with a porter carryin' her bags and a white veil fastened over her face — so her eyes wouldn't be injured none lookin' at Holbrook, I reckon.

The young feller in the car tipped his hat and says:

“ Miss Hallock? ” And when she nodded he went on: “ We got your wire at Flagstaff. This was the last car in the garage and I just had time to drive over and meet you.”

The gal nodded matter-of-fact and clumb into the car and says:

“We’ll start at once, if you please. You know the roads?”

The feller kind of grinned.

“There ain’t but one,” he says, and pushed a button and his engine started up and drowned out Allingham, who was trying to say something to the gal about how dangerous ’twould be if she didn’t have no manly protectors along.

Then the car slid off and Allingham looked longingly after it, but didn’t make a move because I reckon he knew he wouldn’t have no chance to beat it in a race acrost the plains.

“The irony of fate!” he says bitter. “So near and yet so far! Who was it said ‘Man is a little slower than the angels’?”

“I dunno,” I says, “nor I ain’t keerin’ grately. We got things more important to be thinkin’ about than angels — or gals either, if it comes to that. . . . We got to find the stage.”

No sooner I said that than we heard a hollering behind us and a right puny built team with a driver which looked like he was half Injun and half present but unaccounted for, like we used to say in the army, comes moochin’ along and drewed up by the platform.

“Was you lookin’ for the stage to Springerville?” he asked.

“Yes, yes,” says Allingham impatient, “where can we find it?”

At that the feller sort of glansed around at his rig ’sif to be sure it was still there and says:

“You done found it, Stranger!”

Nobody said nothing for a minute and they was a brief pause, because the vehicle the feller was in was shore a mis’able contraption.

"You ain't got any baggage only yourselves, have you?" he asks.

"No," says Allingham.

"That's good," says the feller, "because otherwise you boys might have to run along in behind."

So then Allingham give a sigh like he didn't mind what happened and we clumb on board and the feller licked at the hosses with his whip and we started off ca'am and easy like they wasn't no such thing as hurry in the world.

"Well, we're off!" I says cheery; but Allingham didn't come back in his usual lite-hearted manner. He was looking hard at the driver like he would of liked to have done him a injury.

Finally he give another sigh and says:

"We're stuck, Lem, and we've got to make the best of it, I suppose. . . . For the time being we might as well endeavor to draw what advantage we can from our unenviable situation. It's just occurred to me that you've a rare opportunity to get an interview with our shy and reticent Jehu. By skill and tact you may be able to worm a few words out of him before we reach our destination."

So I drawed out my blank book and pencil and was fixing to worm skillful like Allingham sudgeted, only the feller didn't give me no chance. Because just then he cut loose and started talking, and it's God's truth he didn't stop for the balance of the day only to catch his breath. Even Mother Nature didn't have no show to make her voice heard: this driver plumb occupied our ears.

He begun with his pers'nal history from the day he was christened, which wasn't so odd because a feller by the name he suffered with would shore remember when it was give him. It was Melankthun S. Barrows. He let on it had brought him good luck, by which mebbe he was

meaning he enjoyed regular audiences that couldn't get away from him for two days hand-running.

After he'd finished with his own life he took up the careers of his close friends and rel'tives, and when he'd done recounted these to his satisfaction he begun bragging on his hosses. He had three teams, he claimed, and they was all wonderful animals if this Melankthun could be believed, which he couldn't, because the ponies we started with were plumb gaunt, so that it looked like their bones would have pushed through only for their hides being so tough. Allingham says they would have been arrested for indecent exposure in a civilized community.

Long towards noon Melankthun give a pause while he put a morsle of chewing in his mouth, so Allingham says quick:

"Do you suppose, Mr. Barrows, that there's any chance of our catching up with that grey car which started just before us, between here and Springerville?"

"Sho!" says Melankthun keerless, "if I was to let these here hosses out —" He left what would happen to our imaginations, I reckon; but I couldn't think of nothing that would bring us up with Miss Hallock now unless the car was to be crippled. So I wondered what was Allingham's idee mentionin' the subject, because he looked plumb serious.

"You ain't figurin' on making one of them love chases like in the movin' pitchers out of this tour, are you?" I asked.

"No," he says thoughtful, "not exactly. But you might go so far as to call it a pursuit — behind difficulties."

He was looking hard at Melankthun's hosses, which had kept up the same gait since we'd set out. It looked like they just leaned forrard and started to fall and then caught

themselves and paused a minute surprised that they were still on their feet, before taking the next step.

Melankthun glanced at Allingham right sharp, because as a rule fellers are touchy about their team just like about their wife. And it's been one of my experiences that the ornerier-looking the incumbrans is the more sens'tif the feller's liable to be.

Melankthun looked like he was going to have a mood, and I shore hated the idea; we were having enough trouble as it was. But finally he says:

"I see you're noticin' that new step the hosses invented for themselves. I done named it the Hesitatin' Dip — but you kin call it what you're a mind to."

"I would call it dangerous," says Allingham. "One might easily drop off to sleep under its soothing rythm and fall out of this rig before he knew it. I think I'll just get out and stretch my legs for a bit."

So that's what he done, and I jined him and we walked a right smart piece. But we had to wait so often for Melankthun to catch up that it seemed like we were losing time, so finally we climbed back into the stage again. In the meanwhile, however, Allingham had thunk up a plan. He was to engage Melankthun in convesation and when he give out I was to relay him and then when I'd got exhausted Allingham was to take another shift and so on like that till Melankthun was plumb talked out.

So we tried the plan but it didn't work good, because when he seen what we was up to Melankthun just histed his voice a couple of notches and hit the convesational trail on a high lope and before a grate while we realized we was licked and quit. And long about five o'clock in the afternoon we figured we'd of done better not to make Melankthun strain his voice, for the reason that when we were

yet ten miles and more from St. Johns, where we were to spend the night, Melankthun's pipes give out, so that all he could do was to make motions with his face like he was yelling. And with that the team stopped also and couldn't be got to move by no means.

We done everything we could, but 'twas no use. Them ornery critters just stood there in the road plumb contented, their eyes closed and a slite smile on their faces. I reckon they thought they'd walked slap into heaven. .

Allingham and me decided not to waste no more time there, so we clumb out'n the stage and begun taking long steps to save our shoes in the direction of St. Johns.

It wasn't bad going for the first five or six miles, but long about sundown a cold wind sprung up from the north and come creepin' up behind and slippin' in between the chinks in a feller's ribs, till once or twice I glanced down to see if my shirt wa'n't ballooning out in front. Allingham's teeth was chattering with the cold, but yet he seemed right cheerful, mebbe because he figured he was inchin' up on the gal — or mebbe because we couldn't hear nobody's voice only a coyote's down a little draw to our left.

"How wonderful the stars are!" Allingham says abrupt. "Surely there is nothing so lovely as nature unadorned — in all her naked beauty!"

"Nature would make more of a hit with me," I says, "if her and me was both wearing overcoats."

"You're not cold, are you?" asks Allingham like he was surprised.

"No," I says sarcastic, "I reckon ere long I'll shiver up a sweat!"

So Allingham looked at me discouraged.

"Where is your poet's soul, Lem?" he asks reproachful.

"It's where my luck is, I reckon," I says, "and if you can locate that I'll split with you and no questions asked."

But Allingham didn't have no comeback.

"I would like," I says, "to have some of them nature lovers here now with no more clothes on than we've got. I've heard tell they's a lot of books about the pleasures of communin' first hand with nature, but it's my notion them books was wrote in a warm room with a fire burning and mebbe, if the writer had a independent income, a sideboard handy. Being close to the soil is all right if you got a couple of seasoned planks between you an' it. Otherwise not."

"Well," says Allingham short, "I'll be glad to discuss the point with you further as soon as we get out of this confounded wind. . . . But yonder are the lights of St. Johns! "

So we stopped arguring about nature till we could get indoors and talk comfortable.

CHAPTER IX

NIGHT LIFE IN ST. JOHNS

WE made a bee-line for the hotel when we got into St. Johns, me because I was hungry and Allingham because he figured he might find out something about the stranger gal.

"It's possible she may stop over the night in town," he says hopeful, "and rest up from the fatigues of the journey before going on to Springerville."

But we found she'd only stopped off long enough to git a noon snack at the hotel and had left directly afterward.

"She'd ought to be in Springerville by now," the clerk at the hotel said. "Was you friends?"

"Yes, indeed," says Allingham, "old and dear friends. I can't tell you how disappointed Miss Hallock will be if we don't catch up with her. By the way, could we get a car here by any chance — to follow on with?"

The clerk, which was a tired-looking feller bitin' on a toothpick, shook his head slow.

"The stage leaves here in the morning — Melankthun S. Barrows drivin'. I reckon that's your best bet."

"He's broke down," I says, "ten miles or so outside of town. We come that far with him from Holbrook, and hoofed it the rest of the way."

"Don't let that worry you," says the feller, smilin' languid, "Melankthun always breaks down there. He's got a gal in the hills near by. He'll be along tomorrow."

So Allingham give a sigh.

"We're out of luck, Lem," he says. "We might as well get a room and bath and eat something."

"Let's eat something first — why not?" I suggested.

But the clerk had took a key down from a nail and started towards the stairs. On the way he poked his head into the kitchen and hollers: "Heat up a kittle of hot water, Jerry. Gent wants a bath." Then he looked at me and Allingham more keeful. "An' send up a piece of soap," he adds, "it's a special."

He might have saved this Jerry his trouble, howsomever, because when we got to our room we found the temper'ture consida'ble less than 'twas outside, so we put off the bath and compromised on washing our hands and faces in the water pail. Then we went down and started for to eat.

Allingham acted absent-minded for a spell, till he'd got the major'ty of his steak swallowed.

"I've been thinking," he says then, "how we could make a hit with Miss Hallock."

"That's easy," I says, "all we got to do is stay the present distance from her. She'd take it right kindly, I wouldn't wonder."

"Nonsense. . . . We've got to assume her present attitude is dictated by maidenly modesty. Our cue is to show a little spirit and dash — arrange a *coup* — dazzle her with some heroic gesture of self-immolation."

He rolled hissself a cigareet and begun puffing right feverish.

"For instance," he says bright, "you could hold up her car and I could appear in the nick of time and rescue her and that fresh driver of hers. She'd naturally be lost in gratitude and —"

"How would I git in front of the car?" I says.

So Allingham looked right put out.

“It’s just an idea — ”

“An’ a right pore one,” I says; “what’s more if there’s any holduppin’ to be did you got to take the heavy part. I ain’t in the business.”

Then I seen where Allingham was looking interested over my head and I turned around and coming towards us was a young feller right narrow between the shoulders and wearing one of them belt suits from Norfolk, Va., and a pair of round eyeglasses.

The feller come up to the table and set down prompt and begun smiling at us pleasant.

“This is great,” he says cheerful, “two interviews in one day! The St. Johns Clarion will be able to get out an extra if this keeps up. Who are you gents and where are you from and do you know anything about the projected railroad through St. Johns? ”

“If there’s a railroad coming through St. Johns,” says Allingham cold, “all I hope is it’s here the next time we make the same error. . . . Did you say something about another interview? ”

“Yep. . . . Miss Hallock — lady capitalist from the East — may return to settle in St. Johns when her present tour is concluded — thinks St. Johns women more beautiful than Philadelphia girls and better dressed than Parisians. . . . Have you gents business in these parts or are you traveling for pleasure? ”

“Neither,” says Allingham, “you might say we’re traveling for our health.”

“Shake!” says the young feller cordial. “My name’s Griggs and I come out here four years ago last winter. Yes, sir, four years ago I left that pest hole New York with six months to live — and now look at me! The

picture of health, to say nothing of being sole owner, publisher, editorial staff and compositor of the livest little weekly in the State. And me only four years in God's country! "

"If this is God's country," says Allingham, "he must manage it by deputy, because it's surely in a lamentable state of disrepair. And what's more, don't take what I said about our health in a technical sense. We're not lungers."

"Let's get the interview over with," says Griggs short; "we go to press next Tuesday."

So then a idee come to me.

"How'll you swop interviews?" I asks, pulling out my pad and pencil, "I been trying to make one ever since we started from Vegas on a tour to make a book out'n, and I ain't had no luck at all."

Griggs begun writing fast when I says this and when I give a pause he says:

"Yes, yes — go on. Famous novelist seeks copy in St. Johns scorning less intriguing fields — "

"Make it two novelists," put in Allingham, "and be sure and note down that we're after facts not fables. We want to paint an accurate picture of the West of today down to the last dangerous detail. We would breathe deep of its free spirit, taste its zest, learn at first hand of its adventure, its romance — "

"Hold on!" broke in Griggs doubtful, "You've been reading some of those cowboy books, I'm afraid!"

At that Allingham drawed hissself up dignified.

"I'll admit I've dipped into the bibliography of the subject a bit."

"Well," says Griggs, "the first thing you've got to do is forget all those preconceptions. The West might have

been wild a generation or so ago, and then again it mightn't — I wasn't here at the time. But now all that Woof! Woof! stuff is bunk. As a matter of fact us Westerners are right progressive and up-to-date in all important details. We've got banks and business and motion pictures and pro'bition so-called and all the other earmarks of modern civilization. Why, you can get skun out of your money here just as slick as if you was standing in the middle of Broadway, New York! ”

Allingham looked kind of disappointed when Griggs said this.

“ You ought to know, Mr. Griggs,” he says regretful, “ but I must confess I'd hoped for something different. I thought to encounter at least one carefree cowboy on a grey pacer, with steely blue eyes, a quick hand on the trigger, and seven or eight notches on the butts of his two low-hung six guns. And I'd set my heart on meeting a cowgirl fresh as the rose-dawn, high-spirited as a frolicsome colt but true-hearted at need as the unyielding oak. In brief, I'd looked to find here in the unspoiled sons and daughters of the open a vision wide and uncircumscribed as the eternal plains, something of that sublime courage which scorns all odds, rejoices in the thought of peril, bows only at the grim curtain call of death.”

“ Why,” says Griggs surprised, “ what did you think we were, a lot of savages? ”

“ Whatever I thought,” Allingham says reflectful, “ I see I'll have to reconstruct my ideas a trifle.” Then seems like he got another notion, because he adds more cheerful: “ Of course if one can't get adventures to meet him half way he can always start something on his own hook. . . . Suppose, Mr. Griggs, we adjourn the present conference and take in a little of the night life of St. Johns! ”

“Sure,” says Griggs, “that can be done. I’m game to play pilot.”

“Will you join us, Lem?” Allingham asks polite.

“No,” I says, “I’ve had a right wearin’ day, what with one thing and another. I’m going to turn in.”

So that’s what I done, though I laid awake a spell wondering if Allingham was figuring on breaking his pledge and getting drunk; because I’d noticed he was one of those fellers they call generous to a fault — long as it’s one of their own.

Then I got thinking about how I hadn’t got my interview with Griggs after all; but still it wouldn’t of been wuth nothing, I says to myself, because all him and Allingham had been doing was lying to each another so’s to make a hit with theirselves. So finally I thought, well, I better give up interviews and just write down how folks act and what they say natural and let it go at that. . . . And then I didn’t know no more till morning.

CHAPTER X

PERILS BY THE WAY

WHEN I waked up in the morning I looked around and seen Allingham's bed was empty and hadn't been slep' in and I begun to get right worried. I remembered his talking about night life and adventures and such like and I figured mebbe he'd met up with something or other. Then I heard them beating on the breakfast tray so I decided I wasn't doing no good laying there soaking in bed, so I riz up and went downstairs and found Griggs of the St. Johns Clarion setting at the breakfast table with his head in his hands and groaning.

"Whereabouts did you leave Allingham?" I asked.

"Nowheres," says this Griggs, "he left me. In the lurch he left me — and I've hardly extricated myself as yet, if you must know."

"Is it a saloon — the Lurch?" I asked.

So Griggs groned some more and says:

"It isn't a place at all, it's a condition."

"Well," I says, "if anybody left me in a condition like what you're in I believe I'd git satisfaction."

"That's what I've been trying to get out of this breakfast, but still I'm not getting any more than I can rest easy under."

"You ain't told me where Allingham went to yet."

"Because I don't know — though I've got the place in mind I wish he'd gone to. Since we left you last night I've been propped up against the bar in Jack's Place playing

host in the game of seeing St. Johns double, and trying to get facts for a story. And the only facts I come away with this morning was that this friend of yours has hollow legs and I ain't."

"Allingham's quit drinking," I says.

"So have I," says Griggs earnest, "for good."

"What was you all taking last night? "

"Beer — they call it: if they was a shorter and uglier word it should be rechristened. I haven't felt so bad since the Clarion lost its fight for local option a few years ago and the editorial staff and friends tried to put the licker interests out of business by retail purchases in quantities. They were too strong for us."

Well, I was glad to learn Allingham hadn't been taking no hard stuff, but yet I was some anxious to find out what kind of a adventure he'd embarked on — because seems like that was the only way to explain the fact that he was missing from our midst at the moment.

So I says:

"Take another drag on your cigareet and see if you can't remember what happened — more detailed."

Griggs pressed his hand agin his forrid right hard and thunk manful. Then he shaken his head a time or two like it wasn't no use.

"He took my hoss for to ride on ahead with," he says slow, "and I believe he asked me to tell you to be sure to come on by the stage."

"Well," I says, "I aim to. It's easier than walking. Did he say anything about trying to catch up with somebody? "

Griggs slapped his hand on his knee and looked more intelligent than before.

"I believe there was some such idea. He kept talking

about a stern chase being a long chase and never say die and where there's a will there's a way and similar texts. Also he mentioned an engagement he had at Springerville."

"Yes," I says, "if the engagement ain't moved somewheres else by the time he gits there. Was that all?"

"I couldn't say for sure," says Griggs doubtful, "I have a faint recollection of a story for the Clarion and a bet we made and a lot of laughter about what was scheduled to take place —"

Griggs stopped sudden, because just then the landlady of the hotel, which was a right slim gal reachin' on towards forty or such a matter, came in with my serial food, and says to Griggs:

"Lemme lift you another cup of coffee, Mr. Griggs — or kin I bile you a couple more of them eggs?"

"No ma'am," says Griggs, "not with safety."

At that the landlady looked at the eggs Griggs hadn't ate and says:

"If they ain't right tasty I kin scramble them, Mr. Griggs!"

Then Griggs sort of shoved back from the table looking pale, and mumbled somethin' sounded like cuss words and the landlady begun dabbin' at her eyes and says:

"That's right — run down my food! Here I be, workin' to feed you the best the markets afford till my fingers is wore off clean to the elbones and all the gratitude I gits is you stayin' up till all hours carousin' and ruinin' your health which is pore anyhow. Men is cruel creatures and a woman's heart is brittle and easy broke!"

With that she begun to cry pitiful and run out'n the room and Griggs got right red in the face. I thought for a minute he was ashamed of hisself, but when he begun talking I seen it was just that he was struggling for self-

expression. It must of been hard, because it taken him sev'el minutes and a lot of words before he was satisfied — and then seems like he'd expressed the landlady more complete than him.

“Why don't you comfort the gal instead of swearing thataway?” I says. “A man had ought to show respect for the feebiller sex, specially if they is old and helpless. You had a mother once yourself.”

“Yes,” says Griggs, “but I ain't lookin' for another.” And with that he run out'n the room and slammed the door savage.

Then I looked around and seen the landlady standing there with my eggs in her hand and a fierce glanse in her eyes.

“What was you sayin', Mr. Allen?” she asks. “I didn't jest catch it.”

I started to tell her, because I enjoy being truthful when they ain't no good reason agin it, but then I happened to think here was a good chance to practise diplomacy, which Allingham says is the art of lying with a straight face. So I says:

“I was telling Griggs how if I was him I wouldn't never leave this breakfast room, long as I was welcome here. When a man can feast both his innards and his eyes at once, the first on rich and nurrishen food and the second on such a pictur' of youth and beauty as what I see before me, he's a plumb fool for luck.”

Well, the landlady smiled pleasant and come over and set down beside of me, and I begun to get right fidgetty.

“Mebbe I been too diplomatic,” I says to myself, but I didn't say nothing out loud, only ate my eggs.

“Don't you want I should make you some toast, Mr. Allen?” the landlady asks coixin'.

"No, ma'am," I says, "I wouldn't wish for any."

So then she inched up a couple of feet closer and says:

"You goin' to stay with us in St. Johns long?"

"I'm leaving this morning," I says.

"You should stop here a spell and rest you. When I think on it, a nice young feller like you ought to git married and settle down."

"I got a gal in Oklahoma already," I says; "we're goin' to git married when I kin raise a stake."

Well, sir, when I says that the landlady jumped up and give me a right hard look.

"So!" she says cold. "You're to be married! And you rompin' round like you was free an' deceivin' hundreds of trustin' wimmin that ain't s'rewd enough to see through your treach'rous ways! You men is all the same—I wouldn't take no stock in you if shares was sellin' for nothin' on the dollar. . . . The clerk at the desk outside will hand you your bill afore you leave!"

'Then she flounced out'n the room indignant and I paid my bill at the desk and went out to hunt up Melankthun, and before a grate while I heard a voice like one of them sirens blowing noon and knowed I didn't have to hunt no further.

The stage stood by the post office, with Melankthun waving his whip good-natured and hollering for me to hurry up. They call it thirty-five miles from St. Johns to Springerville, which was the end of the stage line, but when I seen what Melankthun had hitched into the traces I would of walked only for having paid my fare in advance. One of them beasts looked more like a mule than a hoss and t'other more like a hoss than a mule, and both on 'em looked as if they would of sunk down in their tracks only for the harness holding them in place.

But Melankthun didn't seem discouraged none, because after I'd told him about Allingham riding on ahead and had clumb up on the seat beside him, he p'inted at the team proud and says:

"Ain't them magniffercent critters? Lookit how they chomp on their bits and strain at the breechin's eager to be off! "

"Tell 'em Giddap and see if they're real," I says, "they don't look right plausible to me."

Then I didn't say no more because Melankthun started in talkin' where he left off the day before and kept a-goin' steady till I must of dropped off to sleep, because long towards evening as we were movin' through a patch of foothill timber I started awake sudden at a strange voice coming from the road ahead.

"Hands up! " the voice says loud, and there I seen a feller on hossback with chaps and a black mask on and two six-guns p'intin' at us right snaky. So Melankthun and me put up our hands like the feller said.

I was right surprised and begun to figure Griggs hadn't knowed what he was talking about when he claimed there wasn't no adventures in the region. Here I'd made a hairbreadth escape from the landlady of the St. Johns House and was caught in a holdup on the same day, and night not come yet!

The holdup feller kicked his hoss a step or two nearer and says gruff:

"Turn over your weapons and valuables *pronto!* Make haste, or I'll drill you two *hombres!* "

"I ain't got no weapons," says Melankthun shaky-like, "nor I ain't got no valuables — I'm carryin' the mail."

"How about you — the homely one? " asks the feller, p'intin' at me.

“ I got nothing would be no good to you,” I says, “ ’less’n it was advice to quit breakin’ the law and molestin’ two peaceable citizens going about their business.”

“ Silence! ” hollers the feller. “ If you’ve got any money you’d best drop it out on the ground before I fill you full of holes! ”

Well, the feller’s guns looked right convinising and I couldn’t think up no plan at the moment except to do like he said. So I turned my pockets inside out onto the highway, only holding out ten or fifteen dollars agin emergencies.

“ There,” I says plumb riled, “ I hope you spend it foolish! ”

“ Hol’ on! ” whispered Melankthun. “ Don’t sass him so strong! What’s a few dollars when our two lives is at stake? ”

I was just thinking up something to say that would of cut Melankthun deep, when the holdup feller finished counting my money and says:

“ Quit whisperin’, you two, and listen to me — I got to make my getaway yet.”

“ Lemme know if we kin help you,” I says sarcastic.

Then Melankthun, seeing they wasn’t no real danger, says grumblin’:

“ If you was a gent you would of thought twice before stoppin’ us here, late as it’s gettin’. I wouldn’t wonder if ’twas nine or ten o’clock before we hit town. Mebbe you think it’s a pleasure settin’ here in the cold with the shadders of night creepin’ closeter and closeter! ”

“ After I get gone,” the feller come back, “ you can start those varmints of yours creepin’ too. If you whip ’em proper I wouldn’t be surprised if you could yet outdistance the shadows! ”

Well, Melankthun got right peckish when the feller says

this and forgot to be skeered; but the feller just laughed at his language.

Then he looked at me.

“ Take that tie-rope and fasten it round your loud friend’s hands and feet,” he says; “ then take your neck handkerchief and draw it fast across his mouth. I’m afraid they’ll hear him yelling in Springerville, and I can’t take chances on getting caught up! ”

So that’s what I done, though I thought the holdup feller would have to shoot Melankthun before he’d stay still to be tied.

“ I’ll git square with you if it takes a year,” he says to me vicious.

“ Sho! ” I says, “ you’d oughtn’t to make such a fuss over the loss of a few words when both our lives is at stake! ”

So he tried to bite me on the finger but I was too quick for him.

Then the holdup feller asks:

“ Can I trust you not to untie the pris’ner till you get to town? ”

“ Yes,” I says, “ though it hurts me more’n it does him.”

I put that in because I was wanting Melankthun to see I sympathized with him, but I don’t reckon he appreciated the kindness because he got red in the face and strained at the rope till I was afeared it would bust. So I just taken another wrop or two around his hands and feet. I wasn’t going to break my promise even if it was forced out of me at the p’int of a couple of guns. I’m plumb hon’able thataway.

While I was taking the extry wrops the holdup feller backed his hoss off down the road a piece and then turned and loped off and disappeared in the distance. And I drove

on into Springerville, though I couldn't make good headway on account of being afraid of jouncing Melankthun. So it taken four or five hours to get in.

When I reached the *plaza* I drew up at the post office, where a crowd of folks was waiting round pretending they was expecting mail.

"What happened?" they hollered when they seen us. "Did Melankthun hurt hisself?"

"We was held up," I says, "and Melankthun was tied down. I had to promise the holdup feller I wouldn't untie him till we hit town."

At this junction a big feller with a black Stetson on, which I afterwards learnt was postmaster and sheriff and owner of the gen'ral store, stepped out and asks:

"Did the bandit specify what part of town?"

"No. He didn't mention."

"Because," the feller went on, "you been in the town limits now for a mile or more."

"How was I to know that?" I says. "They wasn't no sign pasted on the prairie. . . . But if you think Melankthun is sufferin' I ain't got no objections to your taking the rope off'n him yourself. It ain't a grate deal to me one way or the other."

"You got a lot of sympathy, ain't you?"

"If you'd been listening to that stage driver talk as long as I have," I come back, "you wouldn't worry none over his situation, I'll gamble. . . . However," I says, when I noticed sev'el of the punchers edgin' in, "to satisfy you all I ain't cold-hearted, I'll untie him."

So that's what I done, and for a consid'able period Melankthun just lay where he was and let the words gush forth like one of them geysers, whilst the women and

children run in the post office and the men crowded closer up so's not to miss nothing.

And would you believe it, after me untying him and all, that ungrateful critter aimed most of his remarks at me?

When he paused for breath I says calm-like:

"Melankthun, you've done said enough for the time being. You'd best save what stren'th you got left for what's comin'; because while I'm patient by nature I've got my limitations and you've already went apast them a mile and more."

"That's the talk," says the sheriff cheerful, like it weren't nothing serious which it were. "Fly to it!" he says.

Then he cleared a space where we could be alone with each another and we begun to quar'l.

First I made a pass or two at Melankthun and then he jumped for me and after that we had right smart of a jam for fifteen minutes or such a matter. Till finally my youth and clean livin', as the feller says — or mebbe the fact that I hit him more often — told agin Melankthun and he said he was satisfied. So we shook hands and wiped the dirt off'n our faces and inquired whereabouts the local boot-legger held out.

CHAPTER XI

THE OUTLAW UNMASKED

ME and Melankthun was right popular with the Springerville fellers after the entertaining we done for them, so it wasn't long before we were introduced to a place where they could return the pleasure. It was a right nice saloon for the size of the town, being tasty built out'n dobey blocks mixed with straw and with a American flag on the roof for a landmark like. Over the door was a sign that said, "Hotel Annex," and behind the bar when we got in was a motter like they work in worsted about God Help Our Home and such like, only this one said, "Don't Ask For Credit We Ain't Got None."

Along the wall opposite the bar was a hitching rail about as high as a man's chest.

"What for is that rail for?" I asked the bartender, a fat feller with a smooth-shaved face and a auburn nose.

"There's a customer will be usin' it directly," he says, pointing to a scraggly-built feller with little covering on only what growed natural. This feller seemed right drunk, because he was singin' to hisself and enjoying it, apperiently. "It's Dingbat Jones, the trapper," explains the bartender; "he's a periodical — issued every three months or such a matter."

"I'm a tough little hoss to ride!" says this Dingbat when he seen me lookin' at him.

"I wouldn't wonder!" I says polite. So then he taken another drink and slid to the floor, plumb down.

"Now watch!" says the bartender, and he drug the feller over to the hitching rail and hung him onto it by the arms. Then he stepped off a pace or two and glanced at the effect admiring.

"Y'see?" he says. "By parking them thataway when they gits useless it keeps 'em out'n the sawdust where folks has to walk. Another thing, they kin find themselves easy when they come out'n their trance."

"It's a right handy invention," I had to admit, and the bartender looked pleased and bought a round on the house. Then I begun to wonder where was Allingham, because I didn't have a grate deal of money left.

"You ain't seen a stranger in town this afternoon, have you?" I asked the bartender.

"They was three," he says, "a gal and a chuffer in a big grey car that got in last night and left for Alma this mornin' by the East rout —"

"What!" I says interested. "Was they here?"

"Yep. . . . Then they was a slim-built feller blowed in a couple of hours back which talked continual. . . ."

"That should of been Allingham."

"Well, he's went over to the hotel to bed. Said he had a hard couple or three days work behind him. Was he a friend of yourn?"

So I hesitated, thinkin' of how Allingham had skipped off leavin' me alone with Melankthun for a hull day.

"He *was* a friend," I says, "but I dunno is he one still. I got to have a talk with him first."

With that I left the crowd at the saloon and went over to the hotel.

The hotel was run by a old feller named Hosford Hipple,

which I found settin' up in the best room with a quilt over his shoulders and his feet in a tub of hot water.

After we'd passed the time o' day I asked him what he was ailin' with and he let on it wa'n't none of my business, which was no more'n the truth, so I asks could I get a room.

"I'm lookin' for a feller by name of Allingham," I says.

"Ah!" says this Hosford, "and a pleasant, polite-spoke young feller which offers information 'stead of askin' it. He come in an hour or so ago. . . . Loosy!" he calls out to a gal working in the kitchen. "Take this stranger up to number Sixty-four!"

The gal come to the doorway, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Ain't you never goin' to leave that tub, Paw?" she asks. "Your childblanes should be plumb soffent by now!"

"Never mind me," snaps the old feller irr'table; "take this here guest upstairs."

So we went upstairs to Sixty-four, a big room with two beds in it and somebody asleep in one of 'em. When I looked close I seen it was Allingham.

"You'll have to bunk with him," says the gal; "the other bed is spoke for."

"What!" I says. "Have you got sixty-four rooms full?"

"No," says Loosy, laughing, "that's just an idee of Paw's — we begin numberin' them at sixty!"

With that she left and I stepped over and shook Allingham.

After a bit he opened his eyes languid and mutters:

"You can draw my bath, Pembroke — and don't disturb me again till it's ready!"

Well, sir, I got right riled when he says that, and grabbed the bedclothes and pulled them off the bed.

"I done fit one fight today and I might as well make a clean-up while I'm in the humor," I says; "I got a few questions to put to you first, though. What for did you chouse off ahead and leave me to undergo Melankthun and his team clean from St. Johns here? "

Allingham set up in bed blinkin' sleepy, then yawned and pulled the bedclothes back over hisself.

"That's so," he says, "you have had an ordeal since I saw you last. How did you make out? "

"How did I make out? Well, for one thing we was held up on the way and all my money was stole, only a few dollars I helt out for luck."

"Don't tell me you cheated the footpad! " says Allingham severe. "After all the work he must have had to get you to shell out! "

Then he begun smiling and I decided he was being humorous, so I got plumb disgusted and quit talking and made ready for bed. But I clean forgot about the feller which had spoke for the other bed, so I climbed into it and fell asleep before the idee come to me that I hadn't no right in it.

Seems like 'twas only a couple of minutes before I come awake again and seen the outlines of somebody standing in the middle of the room, swaying backwards and forrards and cussin' to hisself. For a minute I was right took aback, because I recognized by the voice it was that feller Dingbat Jones, the trapper, which I'd seen in the saloon. And I noticed he'd got undressed and was making for the bed I was in.

About that time he caught a glimp of me.

"Who all's that in my bed I done paid for? " he says fierce.

“The problem ain’t hopeless,” I come back soothing, “you kin adjust anythin’ in time except hanging!”

Then I started to get up but I noticed the feller had drawed out a clasp-knife about a foot long and was dancing round and cussin’ some more, so I decided to stay in bed where it was warmer.

“Woof!” says this Dingbat. “I’m a wolf an’ plumb hungry for blood!”

He kept on dancing round and I didn’t say nothing, because I couldn’t think what it would be.

Then all of a sudden I heard Allingham moving cautious, and the first thing I knowed he give a lep out of bed, waving a couple of six-guns round his head and hollering:

“Doggone it, I ain’t been to bed for a month without killin’ a man first—seems like I can’t get to sleep nohow!”

Well, Dingbat give one look at Allingham and grabbed up his pants and snook out’n the door quiet, and Allingham sat down on his bed and laughed fit to kill. Then he stopped laughing sudden and held up a pair of overhauls and says, “Holy Hossifat!”

“What’s the matter?” I asked surprised.

“Get your clothes on quick as you can, Lem! And chase after that burglar—he’s got my trowsis!”

“Sho!” I says ca’am. “That ain’t nothin’ to get het up over. You can likely retrieve them in the mornin’—besides, you got his’n.”

“In the morning—hell!” yells Allingham plumb vi’lent. “You don’t understand—in one of the pockets of those missing garments there’s a black handkerchief with holes in it, which a certain bandit wore this afternoon for a mask. And as soon as that drunken marauder

who just left finds it, there'll probably be a sheriff and posse on my trail."

So I looked at him surprised.

"What!" I says. "Was you the holdup feller?"

"Yes — but don't stand there staring. Get your clothes on and see what you can do!"

Well, I begun to dress slow and careful, because I didn't want to go out that time of night 'less'n I was fit to be seen; and then I begun to think of all the worritin' I'd done on account of the money Allingham had taken — and here t'was all in fun.

So I says:

"This would be a right good time for you to explain how come you got the idgit notion to play holdup that-away. They'd ought to be a good reason for making all that trouble for a friend. I don't know as I feel like venturin' out in the cold night air to save your reputation unless I kin be satisfied you got clean hands in the matter of your motives."

Allingham sunk back on the bed and give a wave of his hand resigned-like.

"'Twas just a bet I made with Griggs of the St. Johns Clarion the other night in Jack's Place. We were drinking a little beer and I got to feeling adventurous and wagered I'd furnish a front page story for him before the week was out."

"Well," I says, "you'll likely win."

So Allingham hove a sigh. I declare, it struck me right humorous — the jam he'd got hisself into, and I begun to laugh hearty.

"Imagine how surprised the sheriff will be when he lights on that black handkercher!" I says. "I'd give fifty dollars to see it, for a fact!"

So Allingham looked at me right funny.

"You'll give more than that, I'm afraid," he says, "before the affair's settled. Because in the other pocket of those trowsis is the money I took from you."

"What!" I says, jumping up and slipping on my pants hasty. "Why'n't you say so before? This here's a plumb serious matter."

Then I busted out after Dingbat without no more words said.

I found him over to the saloon in the midst of a crowd, and the sheriff standing there with the black handkercher in one hand and my money in the other.

"Here," I says, "that's my money. The feller that owns them pants Dingbat's got on just told me so."

"Aha!" says the sheriff. "The outlaw! Why didn't you take him into custody?"

"Because I wanted to git my money first," I says.

"Tut, tut!" says the sheriff, like I'd given him some sass. "This ain't your money no longer. It ain't money at all now — it's evidence."

"I don't keer what you call it," I says, "long as I git the spendin' of it."

So the sheriff sort of hefted the roll up and down gentle and says:

"Would you ruther spend it in jail as an accessory beside the facts or not spend it in liberty an' the pursuit of your way hence?"

So I didn't say nothing more at the moment, the way the punchers kept crowdin' in on me, and after a minute the sheriff put the money in his pocket and started toward the hotel and the rest all follered, Dingbat and me taking up a couple of convenient positions in behind.

We walked up the hallway of the hotel quiet, and

stopped in front of number Sixty-four, stepping more cautious the nearer we come to the door. When we was arrived, the sheriff made a motion for nobody else to talk and whispers:

"Dingbat says the outlaw's heavy-armed and I reckon he's desprit, knowing his helpless position. But we don't want to git keerless—we better have a plan of campaign. I'll be the Staff and you all kin be the Rankin' File. I'm choosin' the hardest job because it takes intellect to be a leader of men and thinking is the hardest work they are. That much is conceded."

"Yes," I says, "by them that never done no manual labor. I done consid'able of both in my day and gimme brain work every time."

"That ain't the accepted theery," says the sheriff stubborn.

"And the reason is," I says, "because them which works with their brains kin talk more plausible about their sufferin's."

"Well," says the sheriff, "it ain't of no immejit importance. Our present problem is to effect the enemy's capture with the least possible casualties. Have you all any suggestions?"

"Why'n't you knock on the door?" asks Dingbat.

"No," says the sheriff, "that might pave the way for diplomatic negotiating and we'd likely be here all night. . . . No, our best tactics is a frontal attack in force. Me being leader, I'll jest retire in behind the Rankin' File so I kin direct the action better. Then when I give the command, 'Charge!' you all kin jump forrard in a single column and bust in the door and spreadin' out over a wide front throw your two wings ahead and execute a incirclin' movement. In that way you kin doubtless sur-

round the foe and cut off his means of communication, thus forcin' him to yield without a quarter."

Nobody said nothing for a minute, then Dingbat spoke up doubtful.

"I been to one hanging, but I wouldn't hardly want to be impelcated in cuttin' off a feller's head. It ain't right civilized."

"Sho! " says the sheriff disgusted. "The enemy's means of communication don't mean his mouth, if that's what your gittin' at. It's the avenue by which he receives his supplies."

"What's the difference? " says Dingbat surprised.

So then I put in:

"Long as nobody knows what you're talkin' about but yourself, Sheriff, mebbe you best carry on this chargin' and surroundin' pers'nally? "

"O no," says the sheriff, "I'm leader and I know my place—it's in the rear. A grate Captain's life is wuth more to him than the lives of many privates, because he kin usually git more of the same if they're kilt, but his chances of bein' born agin are plumb hazzardous."

Well, I was getting tired with the convesation, and besides I figured Allingham had had a good chance to git away by now, so I says:

"If you fellers are ascared to break in, I'll volunteer to make a bustin' and a entry on my own hook."

"Your courageous offer is accepted," the sheriff come back prompt; "you should be decorated for it! "

"I may yet be," I says, "if Allingham ain't changed his disposition since I seen him last."

So I knocked cautious on the door and when they wasn't no answer I pushed it in and they wasn't nobody there at all. So I felt better.

The sheriff and posse come crowding in after me when I explained the room was empty.

"H'm!" says the sheriff thoughtful. "Our bird has flone. I reckon he must of kept a line of retreat handy."

"He did," I says from the window; "it's a clothes-line."

So the sheriff give a glanse at the rope danglin' there and hollers, "Come on, men—to horse!" and they all run downstairs and jumped on their horses and begun riding off in all directions. All but the sheriff, who drifted over to the gen'ral store to receive reports from the different fronts, or so he said. But I had an idee it was to put my money in the safe.

When they were gone and things were quiet once more, I looked around and there I see Dingbat standing discons'late.

"What's wrong with your feelin's, Dingbat?" I asked him.

"I was just thinkin' how I felt when I was handlin' that there roll of money I found in them pants. It was consid'able of a immotion, and that's a fact!"

"Think how you'd felt if you'd owned it," I says.

"I ain't got that amount of immagination, I'm afeared," says Dingbat sying.

"Ain't you going out with the posse?" I asked him then.

"No," he says, "I ain't. Sometime I might be in the same fix that friend of yourn's in and I wouldn't want to recall how I once chased a feller human critter to his death. Besides, I kin see them guns of his'n yet."

"The feeling does you credit, Dingbat," I says, "I wouldn't have thought it of you."

"Yes, I'm right soft-hearted thataway. Another thing,

the saloon ain't closed up yet and I got a little business to tend to there before I leave in the morning."

"Well," I says, "supposin' you go over and wait for me."

I says this because I seen that gal Loosy makin' signs like she wanted to talk to me from the head of the stairs, and when Dingbat had gone she come out and handed me a folded piece of paper.

"Allingham left this for you," she says, "but don't read it here. I don't want Paw to know about his gettin' away. I was out by the kitchen steps when the posse went upstairs and I see your friend shinnying down the fire escape. I thought at first he was tryin' to beat his board bill, but when he told me it was only that he'd helt up the mail I help him all I could."

"That was right kind of you," I says grateful.

"O, 'twa'n't nothing much. I had a beau once was stringed up for a little shootin' he did and ever since then I been parshul to fellers in trouble thataway. So I loaned Allingham Paw's roan hoss, one of the fastest animals this side of the Gila, so I reckon he'll make out. He left me some money as security, but I'd as leaf Paw didn't know about it till you get gone tomorrow. He might act up."

So she left then, and I eased myself out'n the front door and headed for the saloon.

CHAPTER XII

GOING SOUTH WITH DINGBAT

I FOUND Dingbat waiting patient in the Hotel Annex, with a glass holding about a quarter of an inch of beer in front of him.

"Why'n't you drink up and get another, Dingbat?" I asked him.

"Because I need this to show I got a right to be settin' here," he says; "when I know where the next is comin' from I'll swaller it."

"Are you broke?" I asked, because I happened to think how exclusive the bartenders have got since pro'bition give them so much advertising. I declare, if a feller ain't got a slug of money an' a loose wrist he might as well pick his friends in some other line.

But Dingbat just says:

"Quit askin' foolish questions and order up if you're a mind to. And otherwise leave me to my mis'ry."

So I ordered a round and we dranked up. Then while we were waiting for the afterglow, which in this instance resembled a photygraft of a fire got under good control, I remembered the note Allingham had left. So I asked Dingbat to overlook me a minute and opened her up.

"DEAR LEM," it says, "you must forgive me for leaving you a second time, but I really can't wait to say good-bye. The adventure is proving itself even more romantic than I had hoped. I'm heading south

for Alma, where I understand a car in which we're interested has preceded me; so duty and inclination run together. Get that money of yours if you can, because I'm running short of cash.

“*Adiós,*

“ALLINGHAM.”

Well, it give me a right lonesome feeling getting this last word like from a friend fleeing for his life and what little money he had left, while I sat comfortable with a drink or so in prospect and no worries only how to get to Alma without starving.

Then I begun to wonder was they any chance of getting my stake back, so I says to Dingbat:

“How you feelin' now, Dingbat?”

“So, so,” he says patient, “but you don't want to forget the pote's words about a swaller not lastin' all summer.”

So I ordered again, and after one or two more I told Dingbat about the jam me and Allingham was in and asked him what show there was for me to git my money back.

“None,” he says short; “it's been put down in the sheriff's day-books by now — on the credit side.”

Then he begun to realize how desprit I was situated, I reckon, because he got real sociable and started cryin' like he meant it. Seems 's if he wasn't such a bad old feller when you knowed him well enough to buy drinks for him.

Finally he asked me how much I had left and when I told him he says:

“Lem, I ain't got nothin' much only a team and a hound dog and a passel of traps, but such as they is they's yourn. Why'n't you just come along with me in

the morning? I'm going south to my claim in the mountains, where I expect to trap come winter."

"That's on the short trail to Alma, ain't it?"

"Yep. . . . And it's likely the way your friend Allingham took. Mebbe you'll meet up with him—if the posse don't git him first."

Well, it looked like a good idee to me, so I told Dingbat I believed I'd go along with him, far as his claim anyway. Then I got a bottle from the bartender to cut the chill in the morning and Dingbat and me went over to room Sixty-four, using separate beds.

I waked up early but found Dingbat had already riz, because I could hear him singin' out in the corral right cheerful. Which seemed funny till I had taken a look at the bottle I'd bought the night before and found it was weakened consid'able. So I put the bottle safe in my pocket and went down to eat breakfast and pay my board bill.

After I'd et I looked up old Hosford and found him setting in the best room, looking plumb contented.

"I suppose you're leavin' us," he says cheery, "now your friend the holdup feller has vamoosed. I wisht you'd give him my regards if you see him and tell him to send back my hoss when convenient."

"What! Has Loosy told you about the hoss?"

"Loosy? . . . Don't you dast say a word to her about the matter. She's young and innercent and wouldn't rest easy if she knew I had such a thing on my conscience as lettin' a crim'nal escape thataway. . . . It's lucky I seen the feller before he got gone, though. He was leaving by the back way on my roan hoss when I ketched him. I mighty nigh taken a shot at him before I found out he was just wanting to hire the animal. But when he give me all the

money he had left I knowed his heart was in the right place, so I showed him the road south and speeded him on his way."

Well, this looked like right bad news to me. I knowed Allingham had kept his money and the option contract we'd got from old Andrew in his inside coat pocket, which is why they hadn't gone with my money in Dingbat's pants, but now seems like his money was gone also. I begun to figure we hadn't made no great financial killing in Springerville — 'less'n you was to put suicide under that head.

I didn't say nothing, however, just paid my bill and put the two-three dollars I had left in my pocket and went out to jine Dingbat. But I hadn't wore out my streak of hard luck yet, because no sooner I'd stepped out the front door and looked around for the team than I got another shock mighty nigh floored me. I seen the team all right, and Dingbat settin' up in the driver's seat important, but what give me the fantods was a pinto colt standin' by with a fem'nine figger atop of him; because the gal that owned the figger was no other than that Miss Hallock Allingham had speedit south to find.

I reckon I must of looked plumb downhearted when I come up, because Miss Hallock bust out laughing and says:

"You don't seem overjoyed to see me, Mr. Allen!"

"Well," I says, some hacked, "we've run into a slug of trouble the last few days —"

"And you're afraid I'll add to your burdens? . . . Because I may as well tell you I've arranged with Mr. Jones to ride with you as far as his claim — then push on to Alma by the short cut through the mountains."

"Yes," says Dingbat when I glanced at him reproach-

ful, "me an' her made a dicker whilst you was layin' in bed this mornin'. I figured you'd be right surprised."

"Nor you wasn't wrong," I come back frank. Then I asked Miss Hallock: "Whereabouts did you leave your car?"

"A few miles down the east road. We broke an axle. The car's being towed in. I hired this horse and rode back to Springerville last night, thinking I'd go on alone — that's when I heard Mr. Jones was planning to leave today. . . . Of course if you object to my company I can still follow my original plan —"

"No," I says, "it's a right wild stretch we're goin' through. You'd ought not to travel alone."

At that she laughed short.

"Nonsense! There's no safer place in the world for a woman than this Western country. I'd always heard that — but I've proved it since I've been out here. I'm in no danger. It's you and your peace of mind we've got to consider!"

Well, she smiled pleasant when she says this and I figured they wasn't nothing for me to do but to lie congenial and say I was tickled to death she was along. So that's what I done.

Then I happened to think how humorous it was Allingham trying his derndest to catch up with the gal when all the time she was in behind of him, so I give a slite smile.

"You heard that Allingham left Springerville sudden — and why?" I asked.

"Alas, yes!" says the gal, solemn. "Too bad, isn't it? I had a feeling that your blithe partner would come to some sad end. . . . But don't let's talk about it — I want to enjoy my day!"

With that she loped off down the south road ahead of us and me and Dingbat stood a minute watching her, because it was a tense crisis in our pers'nal relations.

"Sets her hoss clever!" says Dingbat ingrashuningly.

But I didn't say nothing, just climbed on the wagon and watched the gal. I wasn't going to let Dingbat off too easy, after him gettin' in with the gal behind my back, as you might say.

Then Dingbat licked the hosses and we started off and old Hosford Hipple stuck his head out'n the window and hollered:

"*Adiós*, Stranger! Don't forget there's always a bed here for you and a seat at our table — at the usual rates!"

"He seems a right simple old critter," I says to Dingbat gruff, and Dingbat laughed.

"He's got nigh as much money as the sheriff, which is a sign he don't act simple because he has to but because he wants to. And they's a lot of difference between them two conditions."

Then we didn't say no more for a mile or such a matter, jest watched the road ahead and the gal, which looked right nice in her khaki ridin' suit an' tan boots an' a little three-corner straw hat on top of her hair. An' I thought, well, if Allingham was able to give me all the money he'd feel it was wuth for him to change places with me I'd be right rich. So after that seems like I felt better.

Finally Dingbat says:

"What for was you going to Alma?"

"Well, for one thing Allingham wanted to visit there, because he's heard tell it's different."

"Different from what?" asks Dingbat.

"I dunno," I says, "I'm just telling you what Allingham says he heard."

So Dingbat studied a minute.

"If he means different from any other place in the world he's right, because it is. But if he means interesting he's wrong. The difference of Alma lays in the fact that you kin observe more varieties of nothin' there than in the balance of the known Earth."

So I thanked Dingbat for the information. Then I says:

"What did they ever do to you in Alma, Dingbat?"

But he didn't give me no satisfaction.

So I says: "Mebbe the trouble is you live too much with yourself, Dingbat. That always drives a man to distractions. Why'n't you git a job in town?"

"I kin tell you why not quicker," he says short, "it's because I can't git along with them human hyenas in Springerville, less'n I'm drunk, and if I get drunk I can't work, and if I don't work I go broke and when I'm broke I git sober and then them fellers rides me like at first. So about that time I hitch up and pull my freight out into the hills amongst the prededitory animals where I'm known and respected."

So then Dingbat asked for a drink.

"No," I says, "this bottle ain't for pleasure but only for nurrishment. We kin take a swaller at supper time."

At that Dingbat looked so downhearted I asked him why he didn't quit drinking.

"I done thought of it once or twice," he says frank, "but I decided agin it. Because whenever I make enough money trappin' I'd rather spend it than have it taken off me. Besides, when I get drinking I feel plumb keerless and full of importance, which is the only time I experiences them two grate immotions."

"You don't feel thataway when you run out of licker, though!" I says.

"No," says Dingbat, "but that ain't never my fault — it's my misfortune."

Then he pulled one of them Jew's harps out'n his clothes and begun playin' on it.

"It gives me a pleasant, sad feelin' so I forget my troubles," he explains.

Then he played some more and the hound dog under the wagon begun keeping time to the tune by means of his voice. It plumb give me the creeps.

Finally I decided I couldn't stand it no longer.

"How often would you have to take a drink, Dingbat," I asked him, "to feel as bad as if you was making that noise?"

"Oh, every once in so often," he says more cheerful.

So I gave him the bottle and he taken a drink and put the Jew's harp in his pocket and gave the hosses a cut with his whip and I begun to feel easier. The hound, seems like, was improved in his disposition also.

We had crossed the mesa by now and were climbing the up grade through the foothills of the White Mountains, which is right good hunting country. As we slipped in amongst the trees Miss Hallock turned in her saddle and waved her hand cheerful like she was enjoying the change. And it wa'n't so bad to get into pine woods, and smell the smells there. I begun thinking how much cleaner and peacefuller it was than in them little towns like Springer-ville, which people break their necks to get into. But then I remembered that we weren't earning no money at the moment but only amusing ourselves. If a feller's got a living to make I reckon it's easier to make it off folks than things. I wouldn't wonder if that's one reason towns is popular.

So then I says:

"How do you find trapping for a business, Dingbat?"

"Tough," he says. "It's getting so a poor man can't live and he's afeared to die — funerals is too expensive."

"Well, we all got our troubles," I says; "mebbe you could take a drink and no harm done."

"I kin," says Dingbat, "and I kin take one every so often till easier."

So that's what he done. And he stopped complainin' and didn't have much to say for the balance of the day, till long about evenin' when the whiskey give out and we was yet a right smart distance from the claim, he begun getting glummer and glummer. So I asked him what was wrong.

"Nothing," he says, "only a fit of despair."

Well, I laughed hearty to cheer him up, but it didn't do no good.

"Yes," he says, "here I been in love with that gal Loosy for months, till it's plumb spoilt my nature."

"Loosy?" I says surprised.

Then Dingbat looked pleased.

"It give you a turn, didn't it? But Loosy ain't like old Hosford — she's right human."

He was beginning to tell me what all she looked like, till I reminded him I'd seen her.

"Why'n't you mention the matter to her, Dingbat?" I asked.

"I done so. She says I'd have to quit drinking afore she could jedge the case on the merits."

"Well, why'n't you quit drinking then?"

"Huh!" says Dingbat scornful, "What would I do without licker to drownd my passion in whilst I was waiting for her to make up her mind?"

So I got right riled.

“That’s the fourth different reason you’ve give me to-day why you can’t leave lickin’ alone,” I says, “and they ain’t ary one of them wuth arguin’ over. I wisht you tell me the truth once why you don’t take the pledge! ”

“Because I enjoy drinkin’,” says Dingbat short; “why do you suppose? ”

And those were the last words come out’n him till we reached his claim, when he cussed the hosses for bumpin’ their heads agin the front gate.

CHAPTER XIII

ALMOST BUT NOT QUITE

DINGBAT'S claim lay in a clearing in the woods, with a spring handy and a fence built around it. He'd made hisself a log cabin and a bed of pine boughs and a table and some chairs. There was a stone fireplace also. We figured Miss Hallock could take the cabin for the night whilst we slept outside under the wagon. But first off Dingbat stirred round and tended to his team, and I lit a fire and cooked up a batch of hot bread and fried some bacon and made coffee and warmed up a pot of beans. Then the three of us set down to supper.

Miss Hallock was tired from the ride and hadn't said much of nothing since we arrived, only rested. But as the meal went on she felt more cheerful, seemed like, and let on she thought the claim was a right attractive spot. And she begun praising up Dingbat on account of how industrious he'd been, fixing it up the way he had.

" 'Tain't nothin' extra," Dingbat says modest, " but then I ain't had much of anything to do with. I been right unlucky in my life's work."

" Why, it's ideal! " she says. " And you've done wonders! Making a little home in the wilderness — it's like a story! "

" Yes, marm, a right sad story," Dingbat says.

" Why'n't you eat your vittals afore they git cold, Dingbat? " I put in, but he shaken his head like he wasn't interested, because he'd been eating fast for half an hour or such a matter.

"I was borned unlucky, I reckon," he says, "and my parents they didn't do nothing to retrieve the error. They trained me for a working man instead of a financier like old Hosford Hipple or the Springerville sheriff. If they'd done different I would have knowed how to steal safe and by now could of had me a stake to fall back on in my old age, I wouldn't wonder."

"A feller which takes what isn't hisn is li'able to get into trouble," I says; "lookit Allingham!"

Miss Hallock kind of smiled, but Dingbat says indignant:

"Ho! I don't mean a honest jail-fearin' robber which takes his chances like a white man. I'm speakin' of the kind of thieves which hides their real business behind such names like finance and industry and law an' order, and winds up in the State Senate, more'n likely, instead of the penitentiary. Them fellers has got all the best of things and I wish to Gosh I was amongst their number!"

"But Mr. Jones," breaks in Miss Hallock earnest, "happiness isn't a matter of dollars and cents!"

So Dingbat studied a minute.

"Well," he says, shakin' his head stubborn, "the way I feel I'd ruther be rich an' unhappy than poor an' contented."

Then they was a brief paus and we didn't say much of nothing more, and a little after we turned in and slep' right good the night through.

In the morning after breakfast, when Miss Hallock was about ready to start and had thanked Dingbat for his hospitality and give him a yellowback bill for his trouble, Dingbat took me to one side and let on he wanted me to camp with him for a spell.

“ Make the cabin your home for as long as you’re a mind to,” he says; “ I’ll treat you like you was my own kin.”

“ No,” I says, “ let’s part friends. . . . I aim to pull out for Alma this mornin’. You forget Allingham’s waitin’ for me.”

“ Well,” says Dingbat, “ if you must you got to. How was you figurin’ on travelin’? ”

“ It ain’t over thirty or forty mile. I reckon I can hoof it.”

“ What? ” says Dingbat. “ With two idle critters layin’ round here eatin’ their heads off? I should say not! ”

“ You mean I kin take one of your hosses? ”

“ Take either or both, and welcome — the best ain’t too good for a feller holp old Dingbat the way you done. Besides, it’ll save me that much pasture.”

So I thanked Dingbat and saddled up one of the hosses and told Miss Hallock I was ridin’ her way. She seemed right pleased.

“ You can’t get rid of me, can you? ” she said smiling. “ It must be fate! ”

I started to tell her that was what Allingham had called it, but then I remembered that the situation then had been some different. Mebbe if he’d seen me ridin’ through the hills with this gal he’d of thunk up a better title for the tablow, I dunno.

So I just says:

“ Fate kin be good or bad, Miss Hallock. I ain’t complainin’ none in the present instance.”

Just then Dingbat stepped up and unhitched a Colt’s and his cattridge belt and helt them up to me.

“ What’s that for? ” I asked surprised.

“ It’s a good luck gift,” he says; “ mebbe you ain’t heard that Alma’s one of the most dang’rous spots this

side the Mexican border. It's about a hundred miles from the railroad at Silver City and consid'able further from a good hospital. It's mighty nigh as wild as them places you see in the movin' pitchers. A man ain't safe there unless he's heeled and then he's better off in jail."

"I thought you told me yesterday they wasn't nothing to see there?"

"You can't see bullets, nor yet sudden death, though both them commod'ties is products of the little hamlet you're headin' for. Why, if they don't happen a killing at least once a week in Alma the Almians throws cold hands and then shoots the winner."

"Well," I says, "gimme the gun."

So I strapped her on and we said *Adiós* and Dingbat p'inted out the trail and Roscoe, his hound dog, begun howling like they does when they're happy and we rid off'n the claim.

"Do you suppose Alma's as wild as Mr. Jones seems to think?" Miss Hallock asked reflectful, after we'd rode a piece.

"No," I says, because I figured she was nervous, "I don't reckon so. Most of these towns is improved now'days with modern ideas on safety and such like."

So she gave a kind of sigh and says:

"I was afraid so. . . . I'd give anything to see a real honest-to-goodness bad Western community. It's been one of the ambitions of my life — but I suppose I'm too late!"

Well, I looked at her surprised, her talking thataway.

"That's just what Allingham had in his mind," I says; and then I told her about how he wanted to live dangerous and git romantic adventures and all.

"He must be a more interesting person than I'd imagined," she says when I was through talking.

"He's right entertainin'," I says, "but he ain't plumb dependable to travel with—not when a feller's got to make a living, like me."

I says this because I didn't want the gal to think I was boosting Allingham too strong. But she just give a little laugh that brung out a couple of dimples, one on each side of her mouth.

Then I says: "What for was you headin' Alma way for, if I ain't overly inquisitive? . . . Seems like a right arduous trip to be takin' jest for pleasure."

"There's the educational value of the journey," she says, then adds more serious: "I'd really planned to come with a—a friend of mine, let us say—"

"The young feller in the ridin' suit you said good-bye to on the platform at Vegas?"

So she nodded.

"He was detained—so I decided to make the trip alone, being an obstinate sort of person when I've set my heart on a thing. Well, I expected to reach Alma by car, which wouldn't have been bad at all. My friend was to go by train to Silver City and drive up to Alma in time to meet me there. He's a mining man, by the way, and has business in the vicinity. . . . When the car broke down I had a choice either to return the way I'd come, which I was naturally loath to do; or ride on as I've done. As you know, I chose the latter course—and I'm glad I did so!"

So I had to say I was glad too, for to be polite, and after that we was busy watchin' the trail for a spell, because we'd crossed over into New Mexico and was making the passes through the San Francisco range. We was nine or ten thousand feet up and the only thing outdone

the orneryness of the going was the strikin'ness of the scenery. I ain't no great hand to throw flip-flops over mountains — having clumb too many; but these peaks was right rugged, for a fact. It looked like some old feller had took the sky for a dice box and the stars for dice and rolled them out regardless. And when they cooled off and growed trees they called theirselves mountains.

Miss Hallock didn't say nothing when the view come on us sudden, nor either did I. We jest stood there on the divide and let our hosses breathe and swallowed a lungful or two of the cool air off the peaks and then we headed down toward the valley of the Frisco, where Alma lays. But I reckon we both enjoyed having stood there on the top of the world like for a minute, never-the-less.

After a time we dropped out of spruce and pine timber and come into scrub oak and brush, with a scattering stand of piñon and juniper. And just then I seen a couple of Mexicans cutting out the trail and a right puny-lookin' critter laying on the bank above them, drawring on a corncob pipe.

He seemed a old-lookin' feller at first glimp, and yet not so old neither. His face was all in wrinkles and one eye was slewed sideways and t'other was squinted and both on 'em was about as sparklin' as skim milk. And he seemed plumb languid like it hurted him to watch the Mexicans working, though they wasn't punishing theirselves none.

Miss Hallock and me said "Howdy" to the feller pleasant and he took the pipe out'n his mouth and says: "Howdy — twice!" and put the pipe back and examined the Mexicans again with a pained expression on his face.

"How far is it to Alma?" I asked him.

He never turned around at all this time, only put up one hand irr'table and says: "Shish! Jest a minute, I'm busy!"

"Busy doing what?" I asked surprised.

"Workin'," he says impatient. "Ain't you never heard the word?"

"Often. . . . But I never seen it acted out in this here still life way before."

"Well," says the feller yawning, "we live and learn."

So I begun to git on the prod.

"I ain't learnt a grate deal from you," I says sharp.

"They's no good reason why you should," the old feller come back prompt; "I'm foreman of this county road-buildin' crew and teachin' inquisitive strangers don't hardly come under the terms of my contrack."

Well, at that Miss Hallock give a slite laugh and I got plumb riled and before I knowed it I'd drawed out Dingbat's gun and throwed down on the feller. And he jumped up agyle and shoved his arms over his head.

"I ain't got a cent — shore as my name's Humferry Daggett an' my home State's Arkinsaw!"

"I don't want your money nor I ain't interested in your pers'nal history," I says, "but if you got a few civil answers in your system now's a good time to unvale them!"

"Ask me anything you want and watch how quick you git the rights of it!" says the feller.

So I put up my gun and asked him how far they called it to Alma.

"About twenty mile as the crow flies."

"I ain't a-flyin' today," I reminded him.

"I see you ain't," he says, glansing keerless at Dingbat's hoss. "By your present means of loco-motion, as you might call it, I'd say you got fifty mile or better to go."

"Mercy!" put in Miss Hallock. "That far? . . . Isn't there some place we could stop, between here and Alma?"

This Humferry looked at her a minute reflectful, puffin' on his pipe.

"I'd ask you to stay at my place down the trail a piece," he says finally, "only I ain't had none since a week or so back."

"How come that?" I asked, not because I wanted to know but because it's been one of my experiences that if you let a feller talk about hisself he gits grateful and is li'ble to do you a favor. And we was needing information from Humferry.

"'T'wan't nothing much," he says, "only me an' my wife had a argument and it come to a head. She helt I hadn't ought to do no labor on account of my asmy, which gits right bad at times. But I helt a man ain't doin' hisself justice 'less'n he's taarin' off a man's work. So when the county offered me this job makin' trail I took them up on it without sayin' nothin' about it at home, an' come up here an' cut loose."

"And your wife wasn't pleased?" asked Miss Hallock.

"No, marm, she warn't. In fact, we had words. And finally, ruther than live in a condition of this gorilla warfare, as they call it, I left home. So that's how come I can't offer you a bed tonight."

Well, we left Humferry and his crew then and made our ways down the mountain side towards the valley once more. And after we'd got out of earshot Miss Hallock looked at me kind of funny and says:

"Does it strike you, Mr. Allen, that some of the men we've met recently are given to exaggeration?"

"I've noticed it," I says. Then I got to thinking about various of the fellers I'd known, that lived by theirselves a

lot, and I says: "Cattle handlers claim a cow needs about forty acres of grazin' land to grow good on. But these old fellers many of them have got forty miles or better to branch out in, so they don't put no limits on the expansion of their idees."

"You mean they develop their idiosyncrasies?"

"I reckon. They're right individual, anyhow. The corners of their charackters don't git rubbed off by bumpin' up agin other fellers, like folks in towns. They're right queer, some of them, for a fact!"

So we didn't say no more for a spell, till we'd got down off the hills and was moseyin' along down the valley of the Frisco. It was different country from that we'd traveled, being warm and dusty; yet I was enjoying it. I dunno why it is, but as soon as I git into that New Mexico mesa country they's something about it that gits to me. It's right still and creepy, and I always imagine they's fellers settin' behind the rocks and ridges which have been waiting there for years till I come along — but I don't never see them. Nor I don't know why 'tis I feel thataway.

I was fixin' to tell Miss Hallock about it, but just then I heard a sound like a lobo wolf wailin', and directly we seen a log cabin set close to the road and in front of the cabin a plumb powerful-built woman, about six feet two or thereabouts, washing clothes and singing to herself.

It was reaching on towards dusk by now, so I says:

"Here's a place mebbe you might git to stay for the night, Miss Hallock!" and with that the woman looked up and seen us and waved her hand encouraging, so we rode over to where she was and I got down off'n my hoss.

"I thought perhaps you could put me up for the night," Miss Hallock said pleasant; "I'm on my way to Alma."

Well, the woman taken the snuff stick out'n her mouth

and give me a grip like I'd got fast in a bear trap. Then she looked up at Miss Hallock, who was still settin' her mount.

"Shore!" she says, "Roweeny Daggett ain't never turned a feller woman from her door yet—nor she ain't aimin' to. Git down and rest yourself till I git these clothes done an' we'll have a snack!"

Well, I helt Miss Hallock's hoss and she started to get down and just then I seen her give a startle and glanse acrost my head right surprised. And the next thing I knew she'd jerked the bridle out'n my hand and turned the hoss south and was trotting off down the road with her head in the air. And when I swung round to see what the matter was there stood Allingham with a armful of wood and a look on his face like he'd seen a ghost.

He dropped the wood and come forrard quick and laid a hand on my bridle reins.

"Let me just take your horse a few minutes, Lem!" he says urgent. "I've got to have an understanding with that young lady. Anybody'd think I was poison, the way she avoids me!"

Well, I didn't see no sense in him chasing a stranger gal clean to Alma, so I was goin' to argue with him about it; but before I could say something Miz Daggett reached out and got holt of Allingham's arm and started walking him to the house like he was a plumb infant.

"You done made your arrangements to stay the night here," she says determined, "and here you're goin' to stay—if I have to hogtie you."

So when I seen 'twas decided thataway I taken the saddle off my hoss and hobbled him and went in the cabin to see what was the program sketched out.

CHAPTER XIV

HOSPITALITY A LA DAGGETT

ALLINGHAM was wedged in a corner of the room near the fireplace and away from the door, looking plumb anxious at Miz Daggett, who was in a rocker acrost from him, on guard like. When she see me in the doorway she says cordial:

“Come in, Mr. Allen — welcome to Daggett’s Cove! Not that they’s any more’n enough water here than to lay the dust in a feller’s throat, but I like the seaweed sound of the name so that’s what I call the ranch. My old man was one of them that went down to the sea in ships — or nigh it: poled a raft on the Mis’sippi afore we moved to Arkinsaw.”

“Yes, ma’am, Miz Daggett,” I says, sittin’ down betwixt her and Allingham; “didn’t I meet your husbant up the road a piece, workin’ on the trail?”

“No,” she says frowning, “you didn’t. You might of met Daggett settin’ on the trail, but not working on it. He’s got a prejudise agin work — it’s Christmas all year round with him. . . . But here, I forgot I ain’t got no more husbant. I had a house-cleanin’ a couple of weeks ago and he went out with the rest of the trash.”

She was getting het up gradual, so Allingham says keerless:

“Mebbe we best get some wood and draw water, Lem, and quit bothering Miz Daggett!”

But she give him a look and he sank back into his seat without no more sudgestions.

"Make yourself easy, young man," she says, "you're here for the evening. I ain't one to let the only sociable vis'tors I've had this summer run out on me afore we've hardly got acquainted. I reckon you're figurin' on how soon you kin catch up with that gal on the pinto — what's she to you, anyway? "

"A memory," says Allingham short.

"Was you figurin' on marryin' hon'able or jest triflin'? "

Well, Allingham looked right hacked.

"I haven't met her yet, Mrs. Daggett," he says stiff; "so that my intentions in regard to her are as yet in an embryonic state. I acted upon impulse just now — when I would have followed her. As a matter of fact, I suppose my pride was touched by her apparent disinclination for my company."

Miz Daggett tossed a log on the fire and filled her clay pipe with fine-cut.

"It's a good sign her leavin' when she seen you — shows you done made a dent in her thoughts. I wouldn't despair if I was you." She reached herself a sliver of lightwood and lit up and puffed a spell contented. "After all," she says, "they ain't nothin' like a pipe. Who was it said a woman's only a female but a good stout pipe is a pleasure? "

"I dunno," I says, to be in on some of the convesation.

"Well," says Miz Daggett, "whoever sprang the words first was a smart feller, only he could of put men in the same sentence and not been far out. Especially husbands."

So nobody said nothing for a minute and then Miz Daggett begun talking museumly:

"Husbands is disappointin' critters any way you take 'em and I'd ought to know: I've had four."

"Mebbe you was too young an' innercent, Miz Daggett," I suggeded, "to begin with."

But she shaken her head.

"No. As a gal you couldn't trip me up nohow on the subjects of romance and true love and such. I was in touch with all the best mattermonial liter'ture, Miz Southworth and Berthy M. Clay and dear old Laura Jean Libbey was familiar names to me in those days. And I knowed the earmarks of an ideel husbant as well as the lissum lines of my own figger. I was aware he wouldn't dast show hissself in his wife's company without his swaller-tail and a biled shirt on and his yaller hair curled and the diamond on his little finger flashing prissamic colors in the lamplight. I also knowed he'd ought to could write po'try and pack sweet nothin's around handy and make it his life's business to see that the wife of his bussom was ignorant of hard luck an' dish washin'."

"Your training was thorough, Mrs. Daggett," says Allingham pleasant, because by now I reckon he'd decided he might as well enjoy the occasion, long's he was there.

"Yes," she says bitter, "but bein' educated thataway didn't do me no good at all. I jest told you I'd tried four husbants in all, and not in ary instance did one of them varmints come up to spessifications. The only po'try they made up was for the rent collector, the sweet nothin's they owned was packed careful in their pockets, their life's business was dodgin' work. And not one of them s'rimps wore curly hair or diamonds, while the one suit they possessed strangely resembled the materials from which overhauls is made."

"You shore had hard luck, ma'am," I says comfortin'.

"Oh, I dunno," she says; "I made out in the end. Because when them fellers fell down on me I couldn't conceal

my natural disappointment, and we had words, and one by one the four of 'em folded their bedrolls, when they had 'em, and stole what they could lay their hands onto and drifted."

"Was Mr. Daggett one of them four, ma'am?"

"No — I clean forgot him. His case was different. He didn't have energy enough to move when the first of May was wished on him gentle, so I had to adopt more extreme measures to git him gone. He was throwed out."

Well, they was a brief pause and Miz Daggett begun lookin' in the fire gloomy and I begun to wonder when she was goin' to git chuck ready. But just as I was fixin' to make some hints, they come a sort of shiftless knock at the door and a voice about as loud as a chipmunk grittin' its teeth says, "Howdy!" from outside.

"Who all's that?" says Miz Daggett surprised, and the voice says, "Is that you, Babe?"

So Miz Daggett looked right flustery.

"Well, I'll declare — if 'tain't that there faithful little critter Humferry. He always calls me Babe thataway. My given name is Pansy."

So she opened the door and there stood Humferry holding a bunch of wild-flowers in one hand and a sawed-off shotgun in the other, and not knowing which one to put forrard he was that upsot.

"Come on in, Humferry," says Miz Daggett encouragin', "'twas right neighborly of you to call thisaway."

So Humferry come to a quick decision and shoved the flowers at Miz Daggett and she laid them on the table and then Allingham got a idee and jumped up and says:

"Pleasant as our stay has been, Mrs. Daggett, Lem and I couldn't think of intruding on a family reunion like this — so we'll bid you adieu and be off!"

Before Miz Daggett could put a veto on the notion Humferry gripped his shotgun hard and backed toward the door and says:

“Hol’ on, I’m goin’ thataway in jest a minute. Don’t you all leave yet! ”

He looked so skeert and Miz Daggett looked so hostile that we set down again and they was a brief pause.

“Miz Daggett,” says Humferry then, “how come I called I was wantin’ to buy eggs. Have you got some to spare? ”

So she looked at him right suspicious, but took some eggs from the cupboard and helt them out, and Humferry untied his handkercher which was knotted around some silver money and took out a quarter and laid it on the table.

“Thar,” he says proud, “I’m payin’ for them eggs — afore witnesses! ”

Well, when she seen the money Humferry had, Miz Daggett grabbed him around the neck before he could make out to defend hisself and planted a kiss on his forrid that might’ nigh knocked him down. And Humferry jumped back breathin’ hard and cocked his shotgun and then stood his ground right plucky.

“Where did you get all that money, Humferry, my lam’? ” asked Miz Daggett, eying the shotgun kind of doubtful. “You’re all tired out workin’ for me, poor dear — p’raps you’d like for to stay here tonight and rest you? ”

“Much obleeged,” says Humferry, retirin’ graceful to the door, “but I wouldn’t wish to. I got business down to Alma.”

“Business — at Alma? ” asks Miz Daggett like she didn’t believe ’twas possible. “You’re lyin’ to me, ain’t you, precious? ”

"No, marm," says Humferry manful, "I ain't."

"Don't conterdict me, you ornery little chunk o' nothin!" hollers Miz Daggett plumb savage. And with that she grabbed up a bottle of snuff and sailed it at Humferry and Humferry ducked clever and disappeared out'n the door and we all begun to coff and sneeze till hell wouldn't have it, because the bottle had busted on the wall.

"Here's our chance, Lem!" I heard Allingham whisperin'. "Sneak out while the snuff's working!"

So that's what we did, without Miz Daggett hardly noticin' it, and caught up our hosses and throwed the saddles onto 'em and loped off down the road south. Nor I wasn't nothing loath to leave, neither.

After a bit we slowed down and Allingham wanted to know what all had happened since he'd left Springerville and how come I'd rid up with Miss Hallock when all the time he figured she was ahead in the car, going to Alma on the East rout. So I told him what had took place and he wasn't nigh as put out as I'd expected over the affare.

"Tell you what, Lem," Allingham says when I'd finished, "I'm going to have to adopt a different attitude toward that stand-offish young lady. I'm going to show her I can be as haughty as she is, every bit. When we get to Alma we'll just ignore her existence. We won't even ask if she's arrived. She'll come round all right — you watch!"

So I didn't say nothing, because I knowed Allingham was just talking. But after a minute I says:

"How much money you got left?"

"I've got our option contract on the Golden Nuggett and a price on my head. How about you?"

"Well," I says, "the sheriff at Springerville's holding onto my money for legal evidence. I've got three or four

dollars besides, and some chicken feed I ain't had the heart to count up yet."

So Allingham whistled reflectful.

"We're close to the danger line, Lem! "

"Yes," I says, "we'd ought to be right happy. I don't reckon your friend Neetsky hisself could git into a more entertainin' jam. Not without consid'able thought anyways."

So Allingham laughed and about then we caught sight of what looked like Humferry down the road ahead, so we shook up the reins and broke into a lope once more.

CHAPTER XV

ALMA

WHEN we caught up with Humferry he was riding along proud-like with his shotgun held afore him, while his glass eye flashed fire in the moonlight.

"They ain't many fellers my heft would of stood up to Miz Daggett the way I done," he says when we come up.

"'Twas right pitiful," Allingham says. "I could see her trembling before you and your lethal weapon like an aspen leaf in a high wind, while her face took on the pale hue of ashes. You should be magnanimous in your strength, Humferry — the noblest souls are the tenderest!"

Well, Humferry looked right hacked, because he couldn't figure out whether Allingham was praising him up or running him down; but finally he decided to take it the way it felt best, so he says:

"Mebbe I was a mite hard on her, but a man's got to take a stand now and agin. I aim to be master in my own household — when I'm thar."

"What did you contradict her for though, when everything was going along smooth?"

"Ho! That was a rebuke like, to Miz Daggett's curiosity about where I got my money. I didn't want to tell her the truth, that I'd got it shootin' craps with them Mexicans of mine. Nor I didn't want to come right out and say 'twan't none of her business, because that might of started an argyment and it don't pay to argy none with

wimmin and childern. Jest give 'em a right good startle and let 'em think it out for theirselves. They ain't such idjits as they let on to be."

So Allingham laughed.

"You're some philosopher, Humferry! . . . And now when you've spent your money I suppose you'll go back and that yearling hog I saw in back of the cabin will be slaughtered in your honor and peace and amity will reign in a reunited family."

"No," says Humferry, "I reckon not."

"Why, Humferry —"

"No," says Humferry plumb ve'ement, "it's out'n the question. . . . Though 'twould be all right with me only for the one thing, and that's Miz Daggett's masterful affection. She's done indulged her tenderness for me so long it's worsen a habit — it more resembles a vise. And the result is her immotion is right uncontrollable, at least by me; though I got to admit I possess a certain fassionation where wimmin is concerned. I kin gen'elly keep 'em at a respectable distance away from me — all but Miz Daggett. . . . Why, you-all would be surprised if I should tell you how uttery lovin' that pore critter gits! "

"How come she heaved that there snuff bottle at you this evenin'?" I asks. "Was that a love gift like?"

"Sho! That was jest jellessy — the bitter half of matrimony. Besides, she knowed I'd duck it; I've had plenty of practise. But that ain't here nor there, what I'm claimin' is that jellessy was the motive power behind the heave. She figured I was fonder of that money I had than I was of her, and a sudden impulse done the rest."

"Jealousy's a terrible weapon in the hands of a strong woman," says Allingham reverent.

"It's the truth," Humferry says, "and the funny thing

is they don't have to be no good reason for it. F'r instance, lookit me! ”

So then Allingham and me both laughed — he looked so biggety when he says this.

“ I'll explain what I mean,” says Humferry after studyin' a minute. “ By nature I'm a plumb home-lovin' critter. I wouldn't never stir out of that humble little cabin of ourn unless they was good cause. Why, I actually got so doggone attached to one particular spot it used to break me all up to leave it. I got the spot in mind yet — 'twas jest to the left of the fireplace and a rockin' chair was sot over it, usually.

“ You'd of thought that would of pleased Miz Daggett, but it didn't. She got so jellus of that partic'ler location she threatened more'n once to drop a couple of pails of water onto it — beginning some distance above it where my head was restin' agin the back of the rockin' chair. But I didn't complain none — jest p'inted out to Miz Daggett the orneryness of her motive.

“ But she wouldn't own up to bein' jellus. She put her irr'tation all on the grounds of my health. She said 'twould do me good to stir out now and then and hunt light exercise and mebbe two-bits or so along the highways and byways of Alma. Money for pins, she called it! What in time would a feller want with pins if he could set by the fire and git fed regular? ”

“ That's a good point,” says Allingham interested. “ Did you bring it home to her? ”

“ I didn't git a chance. She done all the talkin'. ‘ I'm fond of you, Humferry,’ she says, ‘ and I can't bear to see you set idle and waste your time thataway. Work is the salvation of a man's self-respect and happiness. And if I have my way, first thing you know you'll be singin' round

here like a lark from night till mornin'. During the day, o' course, you'll be busy.'

"When I objected and reminded her I could make out to git along in my own simple way, she wouldn't listen. 'I know best what's for your good,' she says, 'and besides, I kin make it stick!' Which was no more'n the truth. So I seen we couldn't hit it off and lit out."

Then Humferry stopped talking and there was a brief pause.

"Seems like you told a different story about your martial troubles this afternoon," I says.

"Well," snapped Humferry irr'table, "if I didn't have more'n the one yarn on a subject I'd be a plumb pore re-counter."

So I was going on to say some more but just then we seen a light ahead, which Humferry claimed was Alma.

"Take a good look at it, Lem," says Allingham; "we may have to spend considerable time here—it's all we've got to squander."

So I looked around when we got closer, but they wasn't much to see. The town was set out on a flat mesa with the Frisco, a plumb spindlin' stream, running by on the west side, and on the east the Mogollon range ran north and south, sev'el miles distant. There was a hotel and a gen'ral store and a saloon and a long one story frame building which Humferry says was the schoolhouse and the town hall and occasional used for dances. That was all, only a dobey shack called the jail and two-three tumble-down cabins that looked like somebody had forgot to take them along when they moved. It looked right shiftless, for a fact.

"I've heard tell it's a bad town here," I says.

"I wouldn't say bad exactly," says Humferry, "though

it don't never hurt none to speak slow and polite amongst strangers. But I reckon you'll get along all right if you keep in with Brad Thomas, who runs the hotel and the store and the best saloon and owns the biggest bunch of cattle this side of Silver City. He's got consid'able sayso in what goes on and six growed daughters he's wantin' to marry off. I reckon that's all the information you'll need to know, only don't gamble more'n you've got nor cuss nobody out 'less'n your guns is iled."

So we rid up to the saloon door, from where the light we'd seen was coming, and got down.

Along one side of the room was a bar and across from it was a pool table and in between under a drop lamp was a card table. They was some fellers settin' playin' poker and some other fellers standing round sweating the game. A little chunky-built feller with tow hair was bringing a couple of loads of drinks from behind the bar — one load on a tray and the other packed internal.

Nobody noticed us come in because they was all watching the game. A sizable jackpot was being decided, so we joined the sweaters and looked on and Humferry whispered to us who-all the fellers playin' were. He says the tall solemn-lookin' feller with the hook nose and mustache curlin' back like the horns on one of them mountain goats was Brad Thomas, and he says the feller opposite Brad wearing a big sombrero with a convict-wove horse-hair hatband and silver buttons on his vest was the sheriff. He was a Mexican, seems like, though at first I thought he was a colored feller. He looked plumb light-struck.

The sheriff and Brad was bucking each another, so I didn't pay much attention to the rest. Two was deputy sheriffs, Humferry told us, and one was a revenue officer, and the last was Sim Wood who owned the rival saloon

acrost the street. But Humferry says competition wasn't right keen, because after taking in a dollar or so in the morning Sim would close up his place and come over and spend the balance of the day in Brad's saloon, where they was more life. If he didn't git closed out sooner, that is; because this Sim was a gambler.

Well, Brad win the jackpot over the sheriff, who looked right mean like he couldn't take a joke, and then Brad called for drinks on the house and that's where the sweaters got action on their time and encouragin' applause, because it's their business to stand round and back the winner — if he's generous, that is. And if he ain't they back him just the same, because they're gamblers too.

When the tow-headed feller had come round with another double-barrel order — one for himself and one for the rest of the comp'ny — Brad glansed around to see if everybody was getting theirs and he seen us standing by and so he riz up and come over and Humferry made us acquainted. And when I got a right good look at Brad's face I come near bustin' into tears, because he looked right sad. Like autumn and leaves fallin' and rain drippin' on the eaves and such like. But he wasn't no fool however, as we learnt.

“Take my hand in the game a spell, Humferry!” says Brad, and so Humferry set down behind Brad's chips and the sweaters glansed at him envious. Then Brad walked behind the bar and begun polishing glasses inviting-like, while me and Allingham and two or three fellers lined up on the other side.

“What will you gents take?” Brad asks.

“Whiskey!” I says.

“I'm not drinking,” says Allingham, “give me beer.” Then he adds: “Won't you and your friends join us?”

Brad glansed at the fellers agin the bar.

"Them ain't friends," he says, "they're jest eavesdroppers."

So the fellers turned around and joined the rest of the sweaters like they was interested in the game.

"I'll take a finger or so with you all," Brad says, and so we drinkt up.

"Have one on the house!" says Brad then, and we done so. And when them formalities was over I ordered another because I wanted it. After that we all begun to feel better acquainted.

"Are you fellers fixin' to stay any len'th of time in Alma?" Brad asked.

"It depends," Allingham says; "we haven't decided yet."

"Did you say what your business was?"

So Allingham hesitated, then says:

"You might call me a traveling man, Mr. Thomas."

"Um! What line?"

"The line of least resistance, just now," Allingham says, and then before Brad could say something he puts in quick: "My friend Mr. Allen is an author."

At that Brad took his speckticles off the counter behind the bar and put them on careful and glansed at me suspicious.

"What all are you author of, if I ain't inquis'tive?"

"He's doing a series of love letters for one thing," Allingham says.

"No," I says some hacked, "they ain't exactly love letters—I'm right serious in the affare. But I'm writing a book of our experiences which I hope will be a grate success."

"I don't waste no time with books about experiences," Brad says; "I got plenty myself. What I like is them yarns about cowboys in the Wild West—they take a

feller's mind off the humdrummin' of reality. . . . I suppose you fellers want beds? "

" I reckon," I says.

" Well, I'll take you over and show you to your room. I reckon the gals is gone to bed by now. An' I'll git you a cold snack if you'd like."

" Capital! " says Allingham. Then he adds polite, " We've heard of your daughters already, Mr. Thomas — and how attractive they are! "

Brad looked right unsympathetic, so I asks:

" What are the names of them gals, Mr. Thomas?"

" Ruby and Pearl and Beryl and Opal and Emerald and Sapphiry," says Brad, " and they ain't misnamed neither, because they're shore jewels, as the feller says. . . . Are either of you gents married? "

" Yes, me! " says Allingham hasty, before I could speak. So Brad looked at me reflectful.

" You're the batchelder, hey? And an author. Well, I reckon they's worse trades — school teachin', f'r instance."

" That isn't a trade," put in Allingham, " it's a martyrdom."

" Besides," I says, " I wouldn't wonder if the gal I'm writing to and me wouldn't fix it up before a grate while."

I says this because I didn't want Brad to go building no false hopes for his daughters.

But he just says:

" Don't make no excuses. All I was fixin' to say was that if you fellers was fancy-free an' unroped they wouldn't be no chance for you here. My sons-in-laws has got to be rich and good-looking and a number of other things your fairy godmothers done left out'n the recipe when you was born."

Then Brad come from behind the bar without offering us no more drinks and says:

“You ain’t got no word to leave for Humferry, which you come in with, have you?”

“No,” says Allingham, “except that I hope he won’t stay up late and be tardy with his work in the morning.”

So Brad laughed for the first time during the evening. It sounded like as if a feller was to rip up a tin roof right quick with a can opener.

“Humferry workin’!” he says and laughed some more. “Why, the hardest work Humferry ever done was knitting!”

“Socks for sojers?” I asked.

But Brad shook his head.

“His forrid,” he says, “over five cards helt tight in the left hand!”

CHAPTER XVI

A MATTER OF SUBSISTENCE

THE next morning after we got to Alma I waked up right early, because I was worried. Here we was, owing mighty nigh all our cap'tal for hossfeed and room rent and a eye-opener we hadn't had yet, and no ways I could figure of gettin' out'n the tight. The only pleasant feature of the situation I could think up was that if we starved to death we wouldn't have to buy no tombstone to prove our corpses was deposited in the kind of place customary reserved for such relics — an' that wasn't a plumb cheerin' thought neither. So I was right down in the mouth, for a fact.

I seen Allingham was asleep yet, with a smile on his count'nance. I figured he was dreamin' that Miss Hallock had asked to meet his acquaintance or something, and I didn't aim to wake him because they wasn't no use two of us sufferin' when one would do; but mebbe my being agitated thataway stirred up the air like, because directly he twisted around a time or two and come alive.

"What are you doing sitting up in bed at this ungodful hour, Lem?" he asked sleepy.

"I'm worriten," I says.

So Allingham laughed and rubbed at his eyes.

"We got reason to worry," I says; "a feller's got to live."

"Lots of them don't, however. . . . But quit looking so sad, or you'll spoil my appetite which is so far so good. When a man's broke he should brush up and put on a

clean collar and fasten a smile on his face and offer to lend somebody money! ”

“ I ain’t got ary clean collar,” I says.

“ Well, tie your hankerchief a bit tighter round your neck and leave the rest to luck. Make a practise of looking for the best and it will come to you — sometimes, anyway.”

“ I always expect the worst,” I says, “ then I don’t never git disappointed.”

So Allingham stared at me like he was surprised.

“ Why, Lem! I believe you’re a pessimist! ”

“ If you mean a feller which is willing to learn by experience,” I says, “ I am. I ain’t never been one to lead a yaller-haired young hope around by the hand and introduce it to my friends as a growed-up fact.”

Then Allingham shaken his head solemn.

“ You’ll never be happy till you learn to ignore facts, Lem — take my word for it. There are always two sides to life, the light side and the dark side: and sensible people like myself dwell constantly upon the former. Then before you know it we’re dead and find we’ve been having a good time all our lives, whereas the only thing a deceased pessimist has proved by his unhappiness is that existence — for him — has been a failure.”

“ There’s more stren’t h in dark meat,” I says, “ if a feller’s got good teeth.”

So Allingham just laughed and begun putting on his clothes, and presently I begun to feel better. I dunno why, but seems like I always git cheered up when Allingham talks foolish thataway. He ain’t never really serious — only over some idee mebbe, which ain’t got nothing to do with important things like eatin’ and drinkin’ and payin’ a feller’s way through the world — but yet his talking often makes me easier in my mind. I dunno why though.

"I wonder which room Miss Hallock has?" Allingham asked presently, whilst he was brushing his hair in front of the glass.

"She'll likely run in an' tell you if you act hotty enough," I says. "I thought you was going to be indifferent to her?"

"Oh, I am — utterly so!" he says, and begun whistling. And then being dressed we went downstairs to breakfast.

On the way to the dining room we passed a table in the hall, with a telephone on it and a gal sitting beside it. She was talking through the telephone and she looked plumb young, and purty as a picture. A good-looking picture, that is.

Me and Allingham stopped still when we seen her, and just then the gal finished talking and hung up the telephone.

So Allingham give a right nice bow.

"Miss Thomas, I presume? We've heard of Mr. Thomas' beautiful daughters!"

"Yes," says the gal smiling right pleasant, "I'm one of 'em. And if not the most beautiful, at least the most precious — I'm Ruby!"

Then I figured this was a good chance to get square with Allingham for mentioning to Brad about my letters to my gal, so I says:

"Why don't you get your wife on the wire?"

"Would you like to use the line?" asked Ruby.

"No," says Allingham short. Then he brung a smile out on his face and says: "I suppose you have a good many guests this season of the year, Miss Thomas?"

"Too many," she says prompt, "because instead of minding their own business they insist on taking up the help's time answering foolish questions."

At that Allingham got right red in the face.

"I didn't expect to find such a scintillating display of wit in this out-of-the-way place," he says cold.

"No," says Ruby spirited, "I reckon not. I reckon what you was counting on was a chance to get rid of some of that there wit, so called. At the expense of an innercent young thing that never met up with no fresh strangers before."

"If I did I was disappointed," says Allingham stiff; "I beg your pardon! "

So Ruby laughed.

"You ain't done me no harm," she says forgivin'; "I find you plumb entertaining! "

Just then the breakfast bell rang, so the convesation died out and we went in to the table. But Allingham didn't say a grate deal during the meal. After he'd seen Miss Hallock wasn't among those present he begun eating fast and was through and out on the porch rolling a cigareet before I'd had more'n the one helping of bacon and eggs, nor hadn't hardly examined the company keerful yet.

Brad's oldest daughter, so he said, was the one dishing out the vittils. She was named Opal, and she looked plumb sorr'ful like wearing the name had give her bad luck. Sapphiry was the red-headed one waiting on the table. I dunno where the others, Emrald and Pearl and Beryl, was. In the kitchen, I reckon. They didn't have no mother because she was dead, Brad claimed.

But they was one important thing I noticed — not one of the other gals I seen was nigh as purty as Ruby. She had red hair, which as a gen'ral thing I ain't parshul to, but it didn't seem the same kind of red like Sapphiry's, f'r instance. Mebbe it's who's wearing the hair, though, and not the color, that makes the difference.

Ruby wasn't dressed fancy none — just a plain gingham

dress with colored flowers on it like you could see anywheres on carpets or wallpapers. But yet her pers'nal appearance was right stimulatn'. It reminded me of campin' out in the hills, when you git up early in the mornin' and there's dew or mebbe a light frost on the ground and the trees are green and fresh and the little chippy birds are puttering round about their business and a feller gits a couple or three extry heart-beats just to glanse at it. That was the way with this gal Ruby.

I explained the idee to Allingham when I went out on the porch, but he wasn't overly interested — only to say I was fickle, which I ain't nohow.

"Because a feller's figuring on getting married," I says, "it don't mean he's got to look at nothing except what's right ugly for the balance of his life."

So Allingham kind of laughed and then begun frowning reflectful.

"Let's leave women out of our cosmos for the time being, Lem, and make some plans. It looks to me as if we might have to stay in Alma for some time."

"What will we live on?" I asked.

So Allingham hove a sigh.

"On sufference, I imagine!"

"It will have to be something more substantial than that," I says, "if I ain't got this Brad Thomas figured out wrong. I believe he's right close. I wouldn't undertake to pry a nickel away from him — not for a hundred dollars!"

"I'm afraid we'll have to fall back on work, Lem!"

"Yes," I says, "I think it."

Then we didn't say nothing for a minute and they was a brief pause while we examined the idee from all sides.

"In some ways," Allingham says presently, "the pros-

pect holds no lure whatever; yet from another viewpoint it can be countenanced. When one thinks of work in contrast to being idly rich — or richly idle, if you prefer — one shudders at the thought of toil and flits like a hungry butterfly in the direction of the latter concept. But when one sees starvation and work advancing toward him hand in hand, rivals for his favor, he is apt to cry with the poet, ‘Lives there a man with soul so dead who never to himself has said, I’ll try anything once!’ And he embraces work, and clasps its honest hand.”

“Supposin’ there ain’t no work?”

“There’s always work,” says Allingham mournful; “the pinch comes when a feller wants to get paid money for doing it. It’s the old, old fight of labor for capital.”

“Well,” I says, “I declare I dunno what we could do. I ain’t seen no cattle round, and I don’t expect there’d be room for a cook at the hotel with them gals about — so that lets me out. And as for you, you ain’t give no proof of vers’tility as a laborin’ man since I’ve knowed you.”

But Allingham looked at me indulgent.

“You forget, Lem, that work is one of those two-edged words that smites somebody else as often as the man who wieldeth it. In short, we can work ourselves or we can work our common enemy the Alma public, the latter plan being easier and more remunerative and therefore preferable.”

“Do you mean stealing?” I asked.

“I can tell you better when I see whether we get away with it or not. But for the present we don’t have to proceed to extreme measures. I’d thought of trying, first, to establish a line of personal credit with our host sufficient for our immediate needs.”

Well, I didn’t think a grate deal of the notion, but at

the moment I couldn't think up nothing better. So I let on I was agreeable if Allingham did the talking.

"Agreed," he says, "but in that event I think you'd better cast off the embargo on my drinking whiskey. I have a feeling that one or two may lend me eloquence."

"You can drink your head off for all me," I says, because I wasn't keerin' grately at the moment.

So with that we moved over to the saloon.

We found Brad leaning acrost the bar talking with Humferry, the subject being whether Humferry should have a drink for nothing or not. And when we come nigh we found that it had been decided not. So I ordered the drinks and we all had one.

It didn't look to me like a favorable moment to approach Brad for a loan of credit, but after Allingham swallowed sev'el fingers of whiskey he taken a deep breath and a hitch at his trowsis and begun to look right pensif, which is the way he gits when he's thinkin' up a good strong lie.

Then he says:

"Brad, you've made a great hit with me. I'd like to do something to show my appreciation."

Brad looked at him hard a minute, then taken his speck-ticles out'n the cash redishter and put them on.

"Make your talk, young feller," he says; "you got somethin' on your mind."

"True," says Allingham, "and thank you. . . . Before I outline my proposal I'd better tell you a little about myself."

"Be sure it's little," says Brad yawning, "and make it pethy if possible."

Then Allingham leaned forrard like he was fixin' to reveal something right important, and says:

"I've got a duel personality: I'm always at war with myself —"

"That ain't nothing to me," Brad cut in. "What is it you're wanting?"

"A chance to talk," says Allingham irr'table.

"Git to the meat of it, then. And remember I ain't had no sleep last night to speak on. Nor to listen on neither."

So Allingham give another hitch to his belt and didn't look discouraged hardly at all.

"Here it is in a nutshell," he says brisk, "some time since I found myself in possession of considerable money and I began to think, 'This isn't right!'"

"You was what wasn't right," Brad says more interested; "they should of got you then."

"They didn't though, because at the time there was a crusade against money and moneyed men starting, and after I'd given what I had away I found myself right in fashion."

Brad shaken his head gloomy.

"That there style never reached Alma," he says. "What's more, money has always been able to find a friend in me. And a safe protector."

"Well," says Allingham sying, "I gave it the go by, once and for all; and since then money and I have been, if not total strangers, at least chance acquaintances merely. Why, I can raise my right hand at this minute and swear on a stack of almanacs a foot high I haven't shaken hands with a dollar bill for days!"

"Is your friend afflicted similar?" asks Brad short-like.

"Not from principle — he hasn't reached my spiritual level as yet. But the author business has been slack of late and the results attained are about the same."

“Are you fellers broke?”

“It’s crudely put,” says Allingham, “yet I can’t say that your diagnosis is entirely wrong, because it would be an untruth. . . . But here’s my plan: I figured Lem and I could do no better than let you give us credit for a few days, thus saving our lives and filling you with the happiness of having performed a good deed in a selfish world — than which, if the moralists are right, there is no greater bliss. . . . It seemed a good idea to me, Mr. Thomas, a splendid idea!”

But Brad didn’t warm up hardly at all.

“It ain’t an idee you got,” he says, “it’s a false hope. . . . Kin you men pay your present bill?”

“If it ain’t too much we kin,” I says.

So Brad figured out what we owed and I paid him with the money I had left and kept forty cents that was over.

Then Allingham says:

“How about a job, Mr. Thomas?”

So Brad laughed harsh.

“My advice to you two is to git on your hosses before they’re took for debt and ramble on towards your dest’nation — if you got one.”

“Well,” says Allingham, “come on, Lem.”

With that he turned from the bar dejected and started for outside, with me follering.

But just as he was about to go through the swingin’ door he run smack into that gal Ruby, who was coming in.

Well, Allingham was shore hacked.

“I hope you don’t think I had a grudge against you for the well-merited rebuke you administered to my curiosity this morning!” he says to Ruby.

But she glanced at him cold and sniffed, kind of.

"If my senses don't deceive me you need a worse currying now than then. You've been drinking! "

"I have had a drop," he says dignified, "but it's to my credit if I show the effects of it. It proves the rarity of my dereliction from the principle of intemperate abstinence."

"Either that or a weak head," says Ruby; "for shame — what would your wife say? "

"I have neither the time nor the terminology to tell you," he says, moving towards the door. "But we must go — don't let's part enemies, Miss Thomas! "

So Ruby laughed short.

"I wouldn't call it parting exactly, because the word implies a previous proximity we didn't yet reach. And as for being enemies, I always have violent feelings over my enemies, whereas the most extreme emotion I derive from you is a slight spinning of the head when I watch you trying to keep your balance. . . . Where are you off to now? "

"To Silver City," says Allingham, "if I can get this storm door open! "

He was shoving on the saloon door with one hand and pulling on it with the other, which surprised me because I couldn't figure how one drink could get him into that condition.

I reckon Ruby noticed it too, because she said decided:

"You're not going to Silver City no such a thing — you're going to bed." Then she looked over at Brad. "This man's in no shape to start riding, Pop — I wisht you'd reason with him! "

"I ain't his keeper," Brad says, "though he'd ought to have one, for a fact."

"There's another thing," Ruby says, "we're going to be short of dancing men for our *baile* Wednesday night and I

was counting on these two. You've got to persuade them to stay! "

It looked like there was going to be an argyment, so I says:

"It ain't because we want to leave so much, Miss Ruby — we've got to."

"Why have you got to? "

"Well," I says, "the long in the short of it is we've been hard-luckin' it for a spell and we're plumb short of money."

"Can't you all work? "

"We kin and we will," I says earnest, "if we git the chance."

"Well, then," she says cheerful, "that's all arranged."

"Whereabouts is the work at? " I asked.

"I haven't time to settle the details," she says impatient; "I'll let Pop attend to that. I've got to make out invitations to the dance."

"Dance? " breaks in Allingham, as she turned to leave. "I wonder if that Miss Hallock who came to town last evening will be there? "

Well, Ruby swung round and stared at him plumb astonished. And you could see plain she wasn't puttin' it on none.

"Miss Hallock? " she says like she thought he was crazy. "What on earth are you talking about? . . . You and Mr. Allen are the only guests we've had in Alma for a month! "

With that she turned around and walked out'n the saloon and left us standing. I dunno how Allingham felt, but for my part you could of knocked me over with a feather. I couldn't immagine where Miss Hallock could of disappeared to nohow.

CHAPTER XVII

ALLINGHAM HAS IDEAS

NO sooner Ruby had left the room than Brad glanced at Allingham and me disgusted.

"Now lookit what you fellers got us into," he says. "Why'n't you go while you had a chance?"

"I didn't see no chance," I says, "we was surrounded."

I was going on to ask Brad what he wanted us to start workin' at, but just then Allingham, who'd been staring at the door Ruby'd passed through, come out'n his trance and hollers:

"Didn't you men hear what Miss Thomas said? What are you wasting time here for? . . . There may be tragedy in our midst!"

With that he busts out the door excited, calling on me to foller speedy.

"What's wrong with that feller?" Brad asks surprised. "Is it a job he's afeared of?"

"No," I says, "he's lost a gal."

"He's lost more'n a gal," says Brad sympathetic, and tapped on his head with one finger.

So I chased after Allingham and helped him saddle the hosses.

"Whereabouts you going to look for the missing heero-wine?" I asked him, after he'd told me he'd find her or perish in the attempt.

"We'll scour the country!" he says determined.

“ It’s too bad you had to go and ask Ruby about her,” I says; “ otherwise we might have been earning good money by now.”

“ Too bad? . . . A heaven-sent impulse brought the question to my lips. . . . Why, not a single ingredient of romance is lacking: beauty in distress — lost or kidnapped, wounded or in deadly peril; two virile, sharp-eyed men keen on the miscreants’ trail — and the trail blind! It’s the chance of a lifetime. What more could you ask of fate? ”

I was going to say a job, but they ain’t no use arguring with a feller in the state Allingham was in. So I just says:

“ They ain’t no rules in this romance game that a feller can’t use common sense, is there? ”

“ No,” says Allingham doubtful, “ I don’t think so.”

“ Well,” I says, “ we’ll save consid’able time and hoss flesh by figuring out what couldn’t of happened in advance. We know Miss Hallock left Daggett’s yesterday headed for Alma, on the only road they is. She ain’t on the road, because we come over it. So she must of left the road. There ain’t been no rain since yesterday, so we’d ought to be able to cut her trail where she left the road, and foller it. . . . You take the right side and I’ll take the left hand and we’ll just ride slow out toward Daggett’s and see what we can see.”

Well, Allingham shaken me by the hand and said Sherlock Holmes hisself couldn’t of made a smarter suggestion, and we rode off, one on each side of the road, bending over and watching the ground close as we went along.

Of course we couldn’t make out no particular hoof prints in the middle of the road, which was traveled right reg’lar, but I couldn’t see where there was any flaws in

my idee of watching the sides where they would of showed plain on the mesa if the gal had left the road, which I figured she must of done in the dark. But it just shows that reasonin' ain't always a plumb reliable friend, because we got clean to the edge of the Daggett claim without seeing a single hoof mark where nobody'd left the road.

Then we pulled up, because we could see Miz Daggett out in front of the cabin washin' clothes and hear her singin' to herself. At first we couldn't make out the tune for the noise, but directly she come out strong on the chorus and we made out the end words. They was these, seemin'ly:

*"Change the name of Arkinsaw?
God a'mighty — NO!"*

Well, they was somethin' right blood-curdlin' to that woman's voice and Allingham begun lookin' reflectful down the road toward Alma, where we'd come from.

"I don't believe we better scour no further," I says, "in this direction."

"Perhaps you're right, Lem," says Allingham sying; "I wish I knew where that girl was!"

"She could of been taken up in a flamin' chariot or she could of retraced her steps toward Springerville," I says; "in either case I reckon we've done our duty towards solving the mist'ry — for today anyhow."

So Allingham didn't say no more, only turned his hoss's head away from Miz Daggett's soliliquizin' and headed for where we'd started. But he was right quiet and mis'able-lookin' on the return trip, for a fact.

As we got nigh town I seen a dust risin' to eastward along the road from Mogollon and presently here come

twenty or thirty Injuns on their ponies and one of them Forest Rangers ridin' along in behind. When Allingham got a glimp of them he had another idee.

"Maybe we can get one of these aboriginals to trail Miss Hallock!" he says hopeful.

"Mebbe," I says, "only they ain't much good if they's no tracks to foller."

So we watched them while they pulled up by the hotel and got down off'n their ponies and scattered round, and then we seen where the Ranger and the Injuns' chief was heading for the saloon. So we follered to see what was the idee of it all.

We got in the saloon just in time to see Brad looking at the Ranger surprised and to hear the Ranger say:

"I understand there's a justice of the peace here!"

"You're talkin' to him," says Brad. "What kin I do for you?"

So the Ranger kind of blinked and says:

"I caught a bunch of Apaches over on the Mogollon reserve hunting deer, and took them in. There's thirty-two in the band. I'm prepared to turn them over to you for trial and punishment."

At that Brad coughed embarrassed.

"Whereabouts did you say you had them Indians hid at the present?"

"They're camped over by the hotel. I'm looking to you to supply them with what they need in the way of food till the trial comes off. You'll be reimbursed later, of course."

Well, Brad's eyes bugged out like he'd seen a ghost.

"You left thirty-two dingbusted Injuns over by a defenseless hotel with chickens an' a pig roaming round and a wine cellar containin' ten or twelve gallons of the finest

grain alcohol that ever went into good pro'bition whiskey? . . . You ain't crazy, are you? "

The Ranger looked kind of hacked and would of made a right sharp answer, I reckon, only Brad didn't give him no time.

"Sim!" he hollers to Sim Wood, which had just come in to see what was up, "you step across and mount guard over the licker and set a couple of deppity's around to see that them pests don't git none o' my live stock. . . . Humferry! You go over and see if the Chief is anybody we know and what kind of humor he's in. Then come back and report prompt."

With that he relaxed hissself and looked around the room at the Alma fellers crowdin' in. I declare, I didn't know they was so much of a population there — they must of been eighteen or twenty all told.

"Here's a fine mess," Brad says to the comp'ny, "all them Injuns quartered on the town and the town pore as it is. It's enough to make a man irr'table! "

His eyes was kind of lingering thoughtful on Allingham as he ended, so Allingham come to the rescue prompt.

"As far as funds go, Mr. Thomas," he says, "you needn't be discouraged. I'm behind you with every last cent of credit you've loaned me! "

So then a pleasant thought must of come to Brad, because he quit frowning and looked right sad.

"I got an idee how you can serve the community of Alma," he says to Allingham; "it'll pass as the job you was askin' for not so long since. You and your friend kin have free board at the hotel till the dance is over if you make good on the assignment. . . . Jasper!" he called to one of the fellers standin' round, "run over and git Sim Wood and tell him to bring the Chief here and we'll

hold the trial right now. They ain't no sense in wastin' our substance on them savages when we got hardly enough to do with ourselves."

"Hold on!" says the Ranger, who'd been standing round impatient. "These Indians are wards of the Government and they've got a right to be defended in whatever action takes place. If you'll wait till I've had a chance to communicate with the Indian Service —"

"We ain't got time for no red tape," Brad cut in, "and as for a defender for them Injuns, I've got one here." Then he give a wink at Allingham. "You've been admitted to the bar in New Mexico, ain't you, Councillor?"

"Which one?" asked Allingham before he thought. Then he seen Brad looking at him hard and says: "Yes, yes — to be sure! . . . And you've hit on the right man to speak for these unfortunate redmen, martyrs to an ancient prejudice. When I think of the pathos of their plight, haled thither for a mere peccadillo —"

"Hold on," says Brad anxious, like he was afeared Allingham would give out before the psychic moment come, "save your speech till it's ripe!"

Allingham started to tell him that he was just cranking up like, and that they was plenty more where that came from and et cetera, but just then Sim come back with a big buck trailin' him. It seems he'd knowed the Injun chief, which was named Hot Tamale in English, and the chief had wanted to see if he remembered the counter sign in Brad's place accurate, so that's how they come over so quick.

But Brad wouldn't serve no drinks because he says the saloon had been transposed into a court of justice. I dunno what he was meanin' by the remark, but anyway he made it stick so all hands went dry. Then Brad let

on that he was the presidin' Judge and everybody must address him as "your honor," even if it seemed queer. And he nominated the Ranger as persecutin' attorney and says Allingham could be council for the defense — which was the Injuns.

Well, the Ranger looked sort of put out and kept mutt'rin' about law an' order, till Brad pulled out his gun and pounded with the butt on the bar and hollers out, "Oh, yes — oh, yes — Court's open and ready for business!" and then the Ranger kept quiet till 'twas his turn. Then Brad told the Injun buck what 'twas all about, in ordinary language.

The buck was some surprised at first, because he thought the Ranger had invited him and his friends over to have a time. He looked right disappointed when he learned he was arrested and started to raar round and talk loud, but Brad waved his .45 up and down once or twice and the Chief calmed down. So then he got that look on his face Injuns git when they want you to think they're keerless about what's goin' to happen and the trial begun.

The Ranger made a right good talk and used some strong language about how wasteful and ornery the Injuns was and how the innercent deer was slottered for to make a roamin' holiday for the maraudin' redskins without any reason at all except that the said redskins wanted to taste venison steak once every so often and claimed they needed deerskins for new moccasins and such lux'rys.

He ended up convinsin' on a p'int of law. Near as I kin rec'lect, his per'ration was as follus:

"In section 863 of the statutes of 1876, chapter an' verse omitted, it says where any Indian found on a National Forest shall be null and void and subject to arrest without warning. Furthermore, if said Indian shall

wound, kill, slotter, or maliciously annoy any of the Government critters which is held in sacred trust for the people of these here United States under bond and in escro, said Indian shall be deemed without benefit of clergy and shall be deported out of the confinement of such forest and turned over to the nearest qualified authority for adjudication as to his crime and punishment, the same to be held without bail until discharged out of the jurisdiction of said officer or lodged in the nearest jail, penitentiary, workhouse or hoose gow, so called, to the end of his time world without end amen."

Well, the Alma fellers give a lite cheer and looked at each another admiringly on account of all the words they'd heard for the first time, and I thought for a minute Brad would have to drill Hot Tamale, he was that irr'table. But Brad, although he praised the Ranger polite for his knowledge of the law and the prophets, didn't give no sign whether he believed him or not, but just motioned to Allingham to take the floor.

Allingham riz up easy and ca'am, like it wasn't a matter of no grate moment one way or the other. He let on that he wasn't overly interested in the outcome of the affare, so long as justice was did to all parties concerned.

"My hon'able opponent," he says polite, but with a smile that everybody knowed was meant to be sarcastic, "has made a great pothor over the law in this matter. . . . But what is law, fellow citizens? "

He give a pause and looked round inquiring at the Alma fellers, but nobody answered. Mebbe they didn't have a right clear notion on the p'int theirselves — I dunno.

"Law," says Allingham, answering hisself when he see nobody wasn't goin' to help him out, "law is the will of

the majority enacted into statues. But has the majority in this instance been consulted? Have the Indians been consulted? Have the deer in question been consulted? . . . No! A hundred — aye, a thousand times — no! . . . But I'll leave that line of argument — merely suggesting to your honor that this is preëminently a case not for law but for justice — law's elder and far nobler sister! ”

He give another pause and the Alma fellers clapped their hands a time or two, because they could see by Brad's face he was gettin' persuaded to Allingham's view. So then Allingham began to open up his voice and wave his hands right eloquent and tell how the Government kept the deer so hunters from the East could come out and shoot them and take the horns back home for to put up over the fireplace and lie about to their friends an' family; and he told how bad the deer felt when a lot of strangers was allowed to chouse 'em hither and yon when all they really craved was to be skelped lovin'ly by their inmemorial companions the Injuns. It wasn't justice to them deer, he claimed.

“Nor is it justice to the noble redmen,” he come out strong, “those first inhabitants of this g-great land we call ours but which is really theirs by virtue of discovery. Isn't it enough that we've killed them in their thousands, taught them our own vile habits of drinking and gambling the fruits of industry away, stolen their manhood, put their effigies on the ignominious penny coin, stood them up in shame before innumerable low cigar stores, sold them glass beads and red cotton shirts and victrolas and such trinkets of small worth — isn't that enough, or must we rob them finally of such innocent pastimes as hunting in the forests and fishing in the streams their forefathers enjoyed and would be yet enjoying but for two things:

first that they're dead and second that it's against the law! "

Allingham stopped abrupt with his hands raised up in the air like one of them statues he'd been mentioning, and Hot Tamale busted into tears and tried for to kiss him, but Allingham resisted. I'd begun to feel right sorry for the Injuns whilst Allingham was talking, and Brad had to use his handkercher a time or two before he could control hisself enough to give jedgment on the rights of the case.

But finally he spoke up slow and says:

"It would be beyond human endurance for my honor not to be affected by the plea council for the defense has put up for the culprits taken in corpus delictus, as us jurists say. But it would be similar impossible, as an official sworn to uphold the law, for me to overlook the fact that the defendants is guilty. So I hereby fine Hot Tamale and his outfit in the sum of one hundred dollars, cash money."

The Ranger looked pleased, sort of, and turned round and left the saloon. But most of the rest present looked as if they didn't know what to make of the decision. Hot Tamale was the only one that seemed right sure of his feelin's, and he let out a yell you could hear clean to Silver City, I'll gamble. And with that a bunch of bucks come lopin' over and busted into the saloon to see what all the row was about. Mebbe they figured the Chief had took his first drink of Brad's licker — I dunno.

Then Brad looked at Allingham funny and I begun to git the geeseflesh up and down my nervous system, because I figured somethin' unpleasant was about to happen. Nor I wasn't far wrong, because Brad says:

"The council for the defense made the p'int that this court had ought to be more concerned with justice than

with law, and the court agrees with him. In pursuance of that there principle the court hereby decides that if the Injuns clear out'n town within ten minutes they won't have to pay the fine, privilege of payin' which is reserved for Attorney Allingham who has so eloquently testified to how he'd like to help his clients out of the jam they got themselves into."

Well, for a spell you couldn't hear nothin' for the noise of the Injuns gittin' gone and the Alma fellers cheerin'. Allingham's voice, which he was tryin' for to use, was plumb lost in the shuffle. Then when the sounds died down a little Brad says to Allingham pleasant, before he could git in his talk:

"Supper's now ready at the hotel, Councillor. You and your friend and your two hosses is welcome for the evening — you've done earnt your keep this day!"

"But how about the hundred dollars fine?" Allingham asks surprised.

"Sho!" says Brad, "we won't quarrel over that. You kin give me your note for the amount and I'll agree not to levy on it — at least till Ruby's dance is through with!"

CHAPTER XVIII

HAZARDS OF SUCCESS

WELL, Allingham and me et a right nurrishen meal in spite of the various probullums hangin' over our heads like, and then we stepped out in Brad's back yard — which was consid'able of a yard stretching nine mile or better to the foothills of the Mogollons — and walked up and down a spell smokin' and discussin' of our chances for weathering the storm, as you might call it.

We were concerned first off with how we was to pay the note Allingham had give Brad for the hundred dollar fine, because till that was settled Brad could attach our hosses and leave us afoot any time he was a mind to.

“Looks like to me we'll just have to stay here in Alma a while and work out the debt,” I says.

Allingham wasn't saying much, just smoking reflectful and pondering. But finally he give hisself a shake and says:

“There's a number of loose ends poking out of the present situation, Lem — and we've got to pick the right one to pull on, to untie the knot. The matter of our finances is awkward, I'll admit, but still I have a feeling that it's incidental to the main issue.”

“Well,” I says surprised, “the main issue must be right momentious in that case.”

“I agree with you. . . . I think that Miss Hallock is mixed up with it somehow, and that simple-looking mining chap

she left at Vegas and expects to meet here . . . and I wouldn't be surprised if the key to a solution of our difficulties turns out to be the Golden Nuggett mine! "

"What!" I says. "You're funnin'!"

I says this because I couldn't make myself believe that they was anything to one of old Andrew Jackson's prospects. But Allingham seemed right serious. He was staring at the black ridge of mountains beyond the mesa rim, where the claim was at.

"I may be wrong, Lem—but I have a hunch I'm not. I'll tell you something: I didn't land at Arnold's without a certain vague plan in mind. I'd heard something about this Mogollon tract—even about Andrew and his claim. I'd learned that an Eastern syndicate has been acquiring holdings about Mogollon, in a quiet way. It's just possible this claim of ours is in the group they're after. . . . There's a lot of gold in those hills! "

"Yes," I says, "and there's a sight of money in the Gov'ment mint. It's gettin' our hands on it that's the hitch."

So Allingham laughed.

"True enough. But if we get a price from the syndicate we won't have to work the claim. . . . Of course I may be all off, but still it's a chance. We'll have to find where the claim is and make some inquiries in regard to the general situation. . . . In the meantime it wouldn't hurt if we could get together a small stake to keep us going—let me think a moment! "

So I didn't say nothing, because this was one of the few times I'd heard Allingham talk as if he had gump-tion, and I was relishin' the sound.

Presently he put his hand in his coat pocket for the makin's and drawed out a cent which he didn't know was

there. He stood turnin' it over in his fingers and starin' at it like he was fassinated.

"Here's luck!" he says soft, like an idee was sproutin' in his mind.

"I ain't denyin' it," I says, "but yet it ain't much luck."

Then all of a sudden Allingham's eyes begun to open up and glissen and a smile come over his face.

"You've got some change left, haven't you, Lem?"

"Forty cents," I says.

"Come on!" he says eager, and drug me by the arm towards the saloon.

"Wait up!" I says. "We ain't got enough to start drinkin' on!"

"We're going to gamble!"

"Hah!" I says sarcastic. "Not me — my heart's weak!"

But when we got to the saloon and Allingham went to the pool table and begun rollin' the balls around the table with his hand, I begun to get interested. He'd roll a ball around from one corner and it would hit on three cushions and drop in the pocket where he was standin' — sometimes.

"The one who does that the most often out of the fifteen balls takes the money," he explains.

It looked easy, so I let on I was agreeable to bet, and so Allingham put up his lucky cent and I put up a cent and got two balls out'n the bunch and Allingham got four, so he took the two cents.

Then we bet two cents each and Allingham win. Then we bet four cents each and I lost. And in about a half hour Allingham was worth forty-one cents and I was broke.

"It ain't as easy as it looks," I says.

"No," says Allingham thoughtful, "it reminds me some of Brad Thomas."

Then he begun rolling the balls around and whistling loud and cheery. They was still a consid'able crowd left from them who had come over when the Injuns blowed in town, and some of the fellers who'd been watching the poker game come over soon and begun to watch Allingham. And finally one of them asks:

"What all kind of a game is that? Kin two play?"

"As many as want to can play," says Allingham, and he explains the workings of it to them. "We can start at a quarter bet, if that suits you?"

So three or four of them put up quarters and I helt the stakes.

Allingham win the first game and a dollar four bits. Then he lost the second game which was win by Sim Wood, and then he win two or three games hand running.

"This is good sport," says Sim Wood, which if I ain't told you, was one of them kind of fellers which wears a seventeen collar and a six hat; "but the stakes ain't high enough to put a man on his metal. Let's play for a dollar ante!"

So that's what they done, only nobody win ary game after that only Allingham.

Finally one or two dropped out because they was broke, but in the meanwhile the poker players, hearing the noise at the pool table, had quit their cards and gathered round to see what the excitement was about. And as fast as one dropped out they was another to join in.

It went on like that for an hour or better. And all the time the crowd in the saloon was growing bigger, seemed like, instead of less.

Allingham began to lose now every once in so often, and usually to Sim Wood, who was improving with the practise he got; but still he win most of the games and my pockets were getting plumb full of money — because in one pocket I held the stakes and in the other the winnings Allingham had made.

Then Brad Thomas, who had been watching from aloof, come over beside of me and says:

“What kind of a enterprise is this your ingeenyus friend is starting round here?”

“It’s a new game,” I says.

“I thought as much,” says Brad; “what might be the name of it?”

Just then Allingham finished shooting his turn and moved over where we was.

“It’s called Pickpocket Pool,” he says.

So Brad studied a minute, whilst he watched the feller called Jasper shooting with his tongue bit hard betwixt his teeth, and then says:

“You fellers are getting together a sight of money, ain’t you?”

“Yes,” says Allingham indifferent, “we had to do something, so we picked the population of Alma to work on. I haven’t counted our stake yet but I imagine we’ll have enough to pay my note to you and snap our fingers in the face of toil for the remainder of our visit.”

When Allingham says this I begun to feel right good, and run our money through my fingers so as to hear it chinkin’ together.

But Brad didn’t seem excited hardly at all. He just looked at Allingham like he was sorry for him and shaken his head slow.

“It’s too bad,” he says solemn, “two bright young

fellers like you be — ! ” Then he stopped like it hurted him to go on.

“ What are you getting at? ” asks Allingham suspicious.

“ Why,” says Brad, “ if my ears don’t deceive me I kin hear the best part of all the loose cash in Alma jingling not two feet distance at the present moment. And these Almians ain’t going to part with that money permanent — not if they kin help it! ”

“ Why, I won it fair and square! ” says Allingham.

“ Shore. An’ the boys’ll win it back fair and square, if they kin manage it. They’ve been sending scouts out for the past hour to draw in new blood and silver dollars. But if they fail to recover the community cap’tal by honest gambling — watch out! . . . They ain’t had no lynchings round here recent and they’re out of practise, but I reckon they could still make out to stretch a neck or two if ’twas thought best.”

Brad looked so sympathetic when he says this that I begun to git worrited, and even Allingham glansed round serious.

“ Surely these men wouldn’t do such an unsportsman-like trick! Why, it would be cold-blooded murder on their part! ”

“ Either that or hot-blooded suicide on yourn,” says Brad, “ depending on from whence a feller examines the affare. Because it’s got beyond sport now — it’s degenerated into a matter of business.”

“ I see,” says Allingham thoughtful.

“ You may not realize it,” Brad went on, “ but you’ve done twisted a turnicue on the arteries of trade hereabouts during the last hour or two. . . . Here’s the situation — they’s just so much money in town to keep things moving. It don’t matter if the boys lose some of it to each another,

because it evens up in time. Nor it don't matter if drinks is bought, because I make it a practise to drop enough in the poker game each night to keep the supply of cash in hand normal. But if any substantial portion of this sinking fund should leave town in the clothes of a non-resident, it would be nothing less'n a municipal calamity and it ain't li'ble to happen."

Well, nobody said nothing for a minute, but Allingham examined the feller shooting right keerful and I taken my hand out of my pocket because I figured they wasn't no use to show off by making a noise with our money.

"You could step in between one of these fellers and his wife," Brad says, "and you wouldn't likely git more'n a scratched face or a black eye, depending on how you was standing; but put yourself in the way of his daily manna an' you'll be lucky to git out alive. The last gent to win any amount here was a Santa Fee gambler ridin' one of the best hosses I ever see. A couple of days later they found he'd shot hisself accidental, down the road a piece. He was plumb dead."

"Forewarned is disarmed," says Allingham. "What would you do if you were in my place?"

"First off," says Brad, "I wouldn't be in your place — the idee's ridicklus. Then again, I ain't one to offer advice to nobody. But offhanded I'd say your course of action will depend on which is strongest, your avarishness or your wish for a safe and pleasant voyage hence."

Allingham's turn to shoot came then, so he shot. But he didn't perform with the same sperrit and dash, as you might say, which he had showed before. He lost sev'el games hand running.

Nor I wasn't nothing loath to feel my pockets getting lighter, neither. I'd begun to figure 'twould be a heap

easier not to have to pack around such a unwieldy amount of money. 'Twas getting right burdensome, for a fact.

Whilst I was decidin' this there come a lullin' in the game and all the Alma fellers got in a bunch and begun talking earnest together. So I counted up the winnings and found they come to about three hundred dollars.

"How much did you start out with?" Brad asked Allingham.

"A cent."

"A lucky cent," I adds.

Then Brad begun to whistle reflectful and after a minute he says to Allingham:

"You got a wonderful nerve, ain't you?"

"I'm not totally lacking in moral courage," Allingham says.

"I was speaking more special of immoral courage — commonly callt gall," Brad says, and he was going on to say some more only just then Sim Wood left the bunch of Almians and come over to where we was.

"I've been choosed to represent Alma in the wind-up of this here contest," he explains. "You've done win right smart of our money, Stranger, and some of the boys is sufferin' extreme so we decided not to spin out the agony no longer. You've got about three hundred dollars, we figure; and we've got about the same sum left. So I'll just roll you for a hundred dollars a whirl till one of us is bust!"

Allingham didn't seem overly enthusiastic about the sudgestion, but they wasn't nothing he could do but play. So he let on he was agreeable and him and Sim tossed up a nickel to see who'd shoot first and Sim win the toss. So he taken the pool balls and stood at the end of the table determined and everybody helt their breaths.

Then Sim leaned over and made a pass or two and rolled right cautious, and the ball swung round the table and come back and dropped into the pocket slick as you please. And at that all the Almians set up a yelling so's you couldn't hear yourself think, till Sim motioned to them to quit.

He missed the second ball but got the third, then he missed sev'el hand running. And when the crowd found he'd put down only six balls out'n the lot they seemed right discouraged and didn't shout much.

They didn't make no noise neither when Allingham got up to shoot, just looked at him right earnest. But I reckon if wishes was hosses, like the feller says, he'd of been kicked in the back a couple or three times before he was a minute older.

He seemed fidgetty when he begun and missed the first four or five balls, which clotted up around the pocket so's to block the pathway for the others. And he cussed once or twice, but not right convinsin'. So I begun to figure he was taking Brad's advice to play off and lose back some of the money. And when he'd done finished rolling I knowed it, because he only got four balls to Sim's six, and the first game was lost.

Well, you should of heard them Alma fellers yell! 'Twas right sickening, for a fact, and I begun to wish it wasn't strategy for Allingham to lose. But still I was aware he was only actin' sensible.

Presently Allingham stood up to lead off for the second game. He waited a minute at the end of the table, and everybody got quiet all of a sudden like they had before. But just as he was fixing to make the first roll the saloon door swang open and three strangers walked in.

The first was a smooth-faced young feller in one of them city ridin' suits and the second was a white bulldog

and the third was a Mexican. You could of knocked me over with a fether — three visitors coming to Alma that-away at once, and no warning beforehand!

Then when they come closer I might' nigh fell over without being knocked at all, because the feller in the ridin' suit was the feller we'd seen last kissing Miss Hallock good-bye on the platform at Vegas, and the Mexican was no other than Encarnacion Sena, the lawyer which had bought the other half of the option on Andrew Jackson's mine. The dog I hadn't never met before.

CHAPTER XIX

LUCK LEAVES THE SCENE

WHEN I seen the stranger feller I looked at Allingham quick to see if he reckernized him and he did, because he give a start and glansed at the feller dissatisfied. But the young feller didn't act like he'd seen us before, which when I come to think of it I reckon he hadn't. As for the Mexican, you couldn't tell what one of them varmints was thinking not if he was fixing to cut your throat the next minute.

The Almians was diverted also when they seen the newcomers, and for a minute forgot the pool game. Because while that was right important in a way they knowed it would wait, and the strangers helt more chances of free drinks than the game. So Allingham waited patient while the unsettlement continued, and Brad stepped behind the bar and waited also, polishing glasses businesslike.

The stranger feller nodded pleasant to the comp'ny and moved to the bar and says:

"If I'm not mistaken it's the custom of the country for a new arrival to buy drinks for the house! "

So Brad put him right.

"It's a custom of tourists coming into the country from the city," he says, "which aim to make up for the smallness of their acquaintance by the largeness of their generosity. However, you kin buy if you're a mind to — it won't be throwed onto the floor."

At that the feller laughed and bought a round for the house.

Then Brad bought a drink and says:

“I ain’t inhospitable, mister, but I got to tell you that your comin’ in when you did broke up a right important conferens of the business men of Alma, which are gathered together tonight to resist a onslaught on their hardly won savings.”

Then he told him about the situation and how the contest stood and all and the feller seemed right interested.

“It looks like a sporting affair,” he says. “Isn’t there any way I can get in on it?”

“The game’s all set,” says Allingham short-like.

From the way he was acting I could see he didn’t cotton to the stranger feller none, and it surprised me because it wasn’t like Allingham to hold a grudge agin nobody — especially when he hadn’t any to begin with. Then I happened to remember how he’d swore when he seen the feller kissin’ Miss Hallock good-bye at Vegas, and I thought, well, it’s jellesy.

But the feller didn’t seem to notice it.

“Maybe I can get to bat next innings,” he says cheerful.

“Surely — if I win!” Allingham says.

Then he give a smile, plumb cold-blooded, and begun to roll. And it wasn’t no time till I seen something had took place in his mind. At the time I didn’t figure out he wanted to gamble with the stranger feller and needed a stake to gamble with, but I reckon that was it because seems like he clean overlooked the ticklish position we’d be in if he win from the Alma fellers.

And I begun to get excited myself when I seen the shots he was making. I knowed it was foolish, but it shore done me good to watch the way he dropped them balls into the

pocket. Even the Almians give up hope and let loose a grone every time he picked up another ball, because I reckon they figured Allingham had done trained them private for the occasion.

When he got through they counted up eleven balls he'd made, and it didn't look like it was hardly worth Sim's while to roll. But Sim was a gambler, and he done better than he had during the whole evening, and put down seven balls — which was right good for him. So Allingham win. But nobody yelled only me and it sounded right lonesome, though it shore give me a heap of pleasure, for a fact.

The third game came out like the second, except that Allingham shot last and only put down enough balls to beat Sim. Then Sim walked over and jined the Almians and they all begun talking together low and rapid. It give me the creeps, kind of, to notice them, after what Brad had said. So I offered to hand over the winnings to Allingham, because they was his by rights. But he asked me to keep them till he'd played a time or two with the stranger feller.

“Let's start light,” the feller says, “for ten dollars a game!”

So they rolled a few games and Allingham win without half trying. Then the feller begun to get impatient.

“Suppose we try stud poker?” he sudgets.

But he lost more at that than in the pool game. He was drinking right smart, and though he taken his losses easy he begun to show a flush around the cheek bones and his eyes was glitt'ring like they do when the gambling fever gets aholt of a man.

Then finally he put in his last bill and set back and drawed out a check book and a fountain pen. And begun to write out a check.

"What's that for?" Allingham asked.

"I'm out of cash," the feller answers; "I'll have to give you a check."

"I can't use it," says Allingham short, and with that he began to whistle and shuffle the cards absent-minded.

The stranger got right red in the face.

"I hope you don't mean to imply my check isn't good?"

"It's no good to me," says Allingham. "Perhaps Mr. Thomas will take it?"

"No," says Brad hasty, "he won't."

The young feller frowned and looked from one to the other of them like he didn't know what to make of it, and for a minute I was afeared they was going to be words passed, what with his drinking and all.

But suddenly his face cleared up and he slapped on the table with his hand. Then he drewed a folded-up paper out of his pocket and laid it out flat.

"I have it!" he says. "Here's an option on a mining claim — on a half interest in the claim, to be exact — which you may be willing to take as security for my check!"

Brad yawned and looked at his watch like he was fixing to go, but Allingham asked:

"What's the option worth?"

The feller sort of laughed.

"It may be worth a million and it may be worth nothing. I came out here to examine the claim. I can't tell you any more till I've looked at it."

"What did you pay for the option?"

"Five hundred dollars."

At that Allingham leaned over eager:

"What's the name of this claim?"

"The Golden Nuggett!" says the feller.

Allingham give a quick glanse at me and smiled, sort of, and I was right surprised. Because it come to me all in a flash like that Sena must of bought the option from Andrew to sell to this feller, and that this was the feller which had made the date with Miss Hallock to meet her in Alma where he had to come to examine the claim. What had gone wrong with the ingagement I didn't know — nor I wasn't keerin' at the moment, because from a pers'nal p'int of view the balance of the situation looked to me like right interesting of a intaglio, as they call it.

Well, after Allingham had tossed me that glanse he set back smiling easy, but his eyes was shining like he was pleased. Then before I knowed what was his plans he reached in his inside coat pocket and pulled out our option and laid it on the table.

"There's the complement to your contract!" he says to the feller. "If Mr. Allen, my partner, hasn't any objections I'll enlarge a little on your proposal — I'll play you a game of pitch for the ownership of both options!"

The stranger's eyes bugged out when he seen the two options side by side. I reckon for a minute he thought he was seein' double. But he was game, because after a minute he drawed a breath and says keerless:

"Nothing could be fairer, friend — cut the cards for deal!"

The Almians had all gathered round, waiting watchful to see what happened to their money; but when they heard the game was to be for a gold mine they watched harder than ever. Then Allingham cut the cards for deal and as he done so I heard a noise behind me and saw that Mexican Sena sneaking out of the saloon door. And while they wasn't no reason why a Mexican changing his position should of made me nervous, yet it did. I was getting plumb supersuspicious, I reckon.

Well, the pitch game come out just like I was afeared it would. Allingham kept on playing unlucky and win. And with that all the Almians drawed off together again and begun talking more feverish than ever.

The stranger give a smile and says:

“I guess that’s my limit tonight. . . . But about this claim: I’m a mining engineer by profession and took a flyer this time on my own hook because — well, because I have some information which may lend value to the Golden Nuggett if it proves up. I haven’t asked you how you happened to own the option you started with — you’re not in the business, are you? ”

So Allingham shaken his head.

“Lem and I just put some money in this prospect for safekeeping.”

“Well,” the feller says, “I was going over to inspect the claim in the morning — and I think I’ll still go. If it’s what I think I may have an interesting proposition to put to you when I get back. If you’re still here? ”

“He’ll be here,” says Brad solemn.

Allingham looked at Brad reflectful and I taken the winnings out of my pocket and give them to Allingham. Then Allingham looked at Brad again and says:

“I wish you’d put these valuables in the safe for me, Mr. Thomas! ”

So Brad passed him the note for a hundred dollars he’d give for the Injuns’ fine and says:

“I’ll take a hundred — for legal debt. The rest you got to accept the responsibility for yourself.”

So Allingham shoved the money in his pocket and begun tearing the note into little pieces.

“Mebbe you better swaller them,” I says; “it’s always safer.”

I dunno whether he would of took my advice or not, because just then the saloon door come open and that Mexican sheriff stomped in, waving a couple of guns and follered by the lawyer Sena.

“I understand the law agin gambling’s been broke,” the sheriff hollers. “Whereabouts is the culprits?”

Everybody looked at him surprised, and one or two fellers made a motion to go for their guns, but the sheriff throwed down on them before they got going good.

“Don’t nobody move!” he hollers again. “It ain’t nothing to me if I kill a couple or three men. I just heard they’s been gambling going on here and I’m after the crim’nals.”

It give me a turn to hear him talking foolish thataway, because he was one of the first fellers we’d seen in the poker game when we hit town. But Brad didn’t seem astonished none.

“Are you after the losers or the winners?” he asks.

“The winners,” says the sheriff; “the losers has done been punished enough already.”

At that Allingham give a sigh and says:

“It looks like tag day for me, Mister Sheriff — I’m the only winner left in all Alma, I’m afraid!”

So the sheriff arrested Allingham and appointed that lawyer Sena as a deppity and ordered him to search the pris’ner, and Sena taken the money off Allingham and give it to the sheriff and put the two option contracts in his own pockets. Then the sheriff give a wave with his gun towards the door and says to Allingham: “Come on!”

“Come on?” says Allingham surprised. “Where to?”

“To jail,” says the sheriff frank; “you’re too dangerous of a felon to be left at large.”

Well, for a minute I was afeared Allingham was going

to jump the sheriff but he didn't, because I reckon he decided the sheriff was serious. So instead he give a lite laugh and looked at me and says:

“ *Adiós*, Lem — I'll see you later! ”

And with that him and Sena and the sheriff moved out'n the saloon, the sheriff leaving last and holding his guns keerful so's they could be shot off easy.

CHAPTER XX

THE RESCUE PARTY

WHEN the sheriff passed out of sight sev'el of the Alma fellers drewed their guns hasty and made a run for the door.

“Hol’ on!” Brad hollers, and they all waited to hear what he had to say. “Don’t let your impulses git away with your judgments! Whatever you fellers are fixing to do, you’d best figure out your plans calm in advance.”

“We got to git our money back!” says Sim Wood determined.

“Shore,” Brad says soothing, “but they’s ways *an’* ways. . . . You mustn’t forget that while the sheriff don’t amount to much hisself yet he’s got the law behind him and that’s backed up by a lot of fellers over to Socorro which has something to say. We can’t afford to have the fair name of Alma p’inted at throughout the len’t’h and breadth of the county court-house as a outlaw village. There mustn’t nothing happen to the sheriff inside the town limits!”

“They ain’t no law agin follerin’ him till he gits outside them limits,” says Sim.

“No,” says Brad, “they ain’t.”

So then the Almians seen what Brad was meaning and they all run out to git their hosses and trail the sheriff. And I was starting with them because I’d got right worked up over the affare; but Brad stopped me.

“You best stay here,” he says, “and not desert your feller sufferer over to the jail. Besides, I’m responsible to Ruby for you being present at her dance all shipshape and in good order — and I don’t want you should take any more chances of bein’ kilt than you kin help.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” I says, after I’d thunk over what he said. “When do you reckon they’ll leave Allingham out of jail?”

“It depends some on what luck the boys has with the sheriff tonight — but don’t git discouraged. Your friend ain’t nigh so valuable a soovenir now as he was an hour back. I don’t reckon they’ll leave him languish only long enough so’s it will look respectable to turn him loose.”

So I felt better, and set down to the table with the stranger feller who’d been watching what took place right interested. I asked him what he figured we’d best do about the Golden Nuggett claim, now that our options was taken off us by that lawyer Sena. Then I told him about how Allingham and me had met Sena when we got the option off Andrew and how come we’d started for Alma and all.

He seemed apsorbed in the yarn and let on he was the feller Mr. Arnold, the boss at the Bar T, had been taking round looking for mining prospects. But he didn’t say nothing about Miss Hallock, nor either did I, because I wasn’t well enough acquainted with him to mention his wimmin folks to him.

Finally he says:

“When your friend gets out of jail I’ll have a talk with him. I wouldn’t be surprised if we could do some business together. In the meantime we needn’t worry over the title to the claim, which still vests in old Jackson — the important thing for us to do is find out where the claim is and

what it amounts to. If I can get a guide I'll ride over in the morning, as I'd planned, and see what I can discover."

"I'll git you a guide," Brad says; "that's easy."

So the stranger feller thanked him and asked could he git credit till he was in funds again and Brad said he reckoned his hoss and outfit was wuth a gamble and so the feller went on over to bed. Brad and the bulldog went with him and the little tow-headed feller we'd seen the night we come, and which was named Stub Whitson, was left behind to tend bar.

Then me and Stub had a drink together.

I hadn't hardly ever seen this Stub when he wasn't either mixing a drink or swallering it. He looked right peakid and I figured he was drinking too much.

So I says:

"Stub, why'n't you quit drinking? "

"Why'n't you quit yourself? " he says.

"Well, I have thought of it more'n once."

"I kin say the same," he admitted, "and no longer ago than last month I made me a resolution never to take more'n one drink at a time."

"If you would only take one every other time it would be better," I says, "because it's easy seen you're getting to be a drunkard, Stub! You'd ought to undergo a cure for the habit."

"I am," he says.

"What kind of a cure? " I asks surprised.

"The whiskey cure — which is the only sure one they is. . . . Nor they ain't no after effects for the patient drinker, neither."

So I seen what he was driving at.

"The after effects on the survivin' remnants of your fam'ly would be unpleasant," I says; "funerals is right expensive these days, Stub! "

"Well, I would of quit drinking, wouldn't I? That's the main p'int in a cure."

So I didn't say no more at the time, because I seen it wasn't no use to try and reform Stub — he was too mule-headed. And besides, I didn't have no hold on him, though for a minute I wished I had. It's funny how fellers always want to inflict their idees on other fellers which like as not ain't doing them no manner of harm. Like me in this junction, f'r instance. I would of liked first rate to have been able to make Stub do like I wanted and quit drinking, though it really wasn't hurting me none — only in the mind.

Well, seems like reasonin' didn't make me feel no more tol'rant and the more I thought about the matter the more irr'tated I got, till finally I remembered that his drinking wouldn't worrit me nigh so much if I was absent from where it was happening. So I said good-night and went over to take a look at the jail, from the outside.

This jail was a dobey shack with no windows and only the one door. The door was locked and I couldn't git in, nor I couldn't hear no sounds when I knocked on it, because it was too thick. So I went out behind the jail and clumb up on a sawdust pile that was left from an old set which used to be there, and begun to feel plumb lonesome. It looked like luck had shore left the vicin'ty for me and Allingham.

But I hadn't been there a grate while when I heard somebody climbing the sawdust pile, and when I looked around cautious I seen a head peering over the edge. 'Twas right spooky, and I begun to git that prickly heat feeling like *chile* tastes, only it was cold instead of hot.

"Who all's that?" I asked, gripping my gun hard.

"It's only me!" says a voice, and then when I looked closer I seen it was that gal Ruby.

She crawled over and sat down beside of me and I begun to feel more cheerful, and not lonesome hardly at all.

“How come you to be out this late hour, Miss Thomas?” I asked polite.

So she looked at me funny and says:

“Don’t be a fool — my name’s Ruby. . . . I was waiting over at the hotel for you with Pop’s pass-key to the jail, so we could rescue that fresh friend of yours. When you didn’t show up I went over and asked Stub where you were and he told me and I saw you climbing up here. . . . I feel sort of responsible for Allingham’s being where he is, because it was me persuaded Pop to let you two stay in Alma.”

“O, I wouldn’t feel bad, Miss Ruby,” I says, “we ain’t made out so turr’ble. Why, for a couple of hours Allingham was the most prom’nent citizen in the community! . . . And if he’d only listened to sense and give them fellers their money back before it was too late he’d be free at this minute. I dunno but what being in jail is partly his own fault, when you think of it.”

“Well — we can’t leave him there all night anyway.”

“No,” I says, “but I don’t believe it’ll do him no harm to stay put a mite longer. He ain’t had a right good chance to catch up with his thoughts recently. P’r’aps we best set here till the moon goes down and mebbe by that time he will of had a suffishen lesson.”

So Ruby laughed.

“This sawdust pile isn’t a very romantic trysting place,” she says.

“Well,” I says, “it’s dry and soft and you can’t see it plain at night. You might think it was something else if you could forget what it was.”

“I might if it was anything but sawdust — ignoring that

word would be unnatural. . . . Besides, what would your fiancée say if she knew you were sitting here with another girl? ”

“ I dunno,” I says; “ that’s one of the many things I ain’t got the answer to offhanded.”

I couldn’t immagine what made me talk foolish thataway; but I was feeling right keerless and light-headed. Mebbe it was me having had too much excitement during the evening for my health, but I dunno.

However, Ruby didn’t seem overly surprised. She just asked:

“ Is your intended good-looking? ”

“ Well,” I says, “ I didn’t pick her for looks, but she ain’t marked none in the face. She’s one a stranger wouldn’t run away from, nor yet towards. And she’s right ruddy-complected — she works in a steam laundry.”

“ You must love her madly! ”

“ Well,” I says, some hacked, “ I don’t surrender to violent immotions as a rule, but I reckon I got to admit being serious in this affare else I wouldn’t have corresponded so faithful.”

“ Shucks! That’s just habit — if you were badly hit you’d know it without documentary proof! ”

It kind of riled me, her tellin’ me about what I thunk and what I didn’t think thataway.

“ Seems like I ought to be able to figure out my own feelings,” I says.

“ You wouldn’t be in the minority if you couldn’t,” Ruby says, rising onto her feet. “ But we mustn’t stay here any longer. Come on, let’s rescue the prisoner! ”

So we slid down off the sawdust pile and went around to the front of the jail and I unlocked the door with the key Ruby give me, and looked in.

It was plumb dark inside — a feller couldn't see his hand behind his back hardly. And the floor, seems like, was made out of a small section of the perarie.

Then all of a sudden somebody inside hollers, "Who comes there?" and I says, "It's me!" and the voice says, "Well, advance you, and give the countersign!" so I knowed 'twas Allingham talking.

"Why'n't you come out when you got a chance?" I asked.

So he uttered a noath and says:

"Because that mud-colored sheriff has hogtied me!"

Well, I was afeared Ruby would hear him talkin' to hisself, so I went in and cut the ropes off'n him and he cussed and stomped till he got his circulation goin' agin. And then, as we were immerging, I explained how Ruby had give me the key to the jail and was waiting for us outside.

"You have made me your eternal debtor, Miss Thomas!" says Allingham grateful.

"That's all right," replies Ruby offhanded, "long as you don't get in a similar relation towards Pop — he might collect the bill more vigorous than I intend to. . . . I thought maybe you might be getting bored in jail. It often happens, they tell me, specially in an old-fashioned jail like this one, without modern improvements such as tea dancings and moving pictures of an evening and a night off each week to visit the folks."

So Allingham laughed.

"What's the matter with the local prison reform club?"

"There isn't any," Ruby says; "the jail isn't patronized enough. Most of the cases in Alma are hoss-thieves and cattle-rustlers and they don't get the privilege of being boarded at the town's expense. They're usually marked 'Fragile' and bumped off before they reach jail."

We'd got nigh the hotel by now, so we said good-night to Ruby and went up to our room and set down to figure out where we stood. It wa'n't so hard.

"We got a long chance on the mine," I says, "but that don't buy nothing now. Otherwise we're just about where we was yesterday morning — far as money goes."

So Allingham looked right serious.

"Well," he says finally, "if the Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, as some claim, we ought to run into a patch of right nice weather before long."

But I was feeling peart, though I dunno why, so I says:

"Far as I'm conserved it don't make no grate difference to me how hard the wind blows, I reckon I kin make out to stand it."

Then I seen Allingham looking at me right funny.

"Long's it don't blow *too* hard," I says.

CHAPTER XXI

AN INTERRUPTED RAFFLE

WHEN I come awake in the morning I noticed that Allingham was still sleeping contented — though he hadn't any real right to feel contented, for a fact. But that's a funny thing about sleep: it don't hold enny grudges agin nobody. Sometimes I figure it don't get due credit for the fact, and then I remember that a feller can't realize how well off he is when he's sleeping and that's likely why he don't favor the condition more. I wouldn't wonder if 'twas the same way about death, because most folks would ruther be conscious of being miserable than unconscious of being at peace. Seems like humans is right conceited thataway.

At first I thought I'd wake Allingham so he could feel downhearted too, but then the idee came to me that he might not see the situation as discouraging as I did and I wouldn't git no satisfaction. And another thing, I was afeared he'd want to go out directly he got dressed and then there'd be the danger he would git arrested all over again — or worse. I knowed he wouldn't listen to no dictates of prudens and stay in his room, so then I begun to wish there was some way I could git him to act cautious like I figured was best — jest the way I'd wanted to git Stub Whitson to quit drinking.

The only difference was that in the present case a notion come to me how I could git a holt on Allingham and influence him for his own good. So what I done was to

take Allingham's clothes with me when I'd got dressed and was ready to leave, because I knowed he wouldn't git far from the room as he was undraped at the moment, and I figured I could slip out and see how the land lay and be back before he felt the need of exercize. But I didn't use good judgment, as it turnt out — though how was I to know that?

On the way to the saloon I hid Allingham's clothes downstairs in the hall and told Ruby what I'd done, because I run into her. Then I went over to get the news, only they wa'n't none. All I seen was a yearlin' hog tied up to the saloon porch and all I heard was Humferry Daggett talkin' loud to Brad acrost the bar.

Humferry had a bunch of paper tickets in his hand, waving them eloquent in the air, and Brad was lissening like he wasn't overly interested.

"Here's Mr. Allen," Brad says when he seen me, "he had a pocket full of money yesterday. Mebbe he'll buy some of them raffle tickets of yourn!"

Humferry looked at me kind of doubtful.

"He ain't got a right wealthy look this mornin'," he says; "I don't hardly believe he'd take a chance."

"A chance on what?" I asked.

"On a yearlin' hog."

"What would I do with a hog?" I says, laughing scornful, because I was broke and couldn't buy no tickets.

"Well," says Humferry, "they's a good many tickets, so it's likely you wouldn't get him and then there wouldn't be no probullum what to do with him at all."

I was thinkin' up a sharp answer for Humferry, but just then we heard a turr'ble outbreakin' of noise from the porch. It sounded like the voices of a dog and a yearlin' hog bein' mixed up rapid with one them wire egg-beaters,

and when we got to the scene we noticed that the idee wasn't so far wrong, because that bulldog the stranger feller owned was goin' for Humferry's hog right fierce, while the stranger feller hisself was standing beside the tablow watching interested.

Just as we come out the hog give a jump and broke the string which was holding him back and started up the road with the bulldog follering. And in about a minute both on 'em had disappeared behind a mile or so of distance.

"Well," says Brad, "that there hog is shore a powerful critter for his age. I never knowed nothing on four legs could run so fast and screech so loud to once."

The stranger feller was laughing hearty, but Humferry didn't say nothing for a spell, just watched the place where the hog had been.

Then finally he says: "I reckon we'd best settle up for the damages, mister!"

So the stranger feller looked surprised.

"It hasn't done your hog any harm that I can see!"

But Humferry shook his head solemn, like he wasn't noways convinsed of that.

"It certainly ain't done him no good," he come back. "An' another thing, I got to increase the number of chances in the raffle now. Every lep that critter takes means more tickets. If his wind don't give out afore he hits the hills they'll be about one chance in a thousand of the winner gittin' him and the affare will be broke up on account of prohib'tive odds."

So then the stranger feller taken us into the bar and bought a round while the argument was being decided.

"I don't want you to feel I'm trying to cheat you out of your just dues," the feller says to Humferry after we was seated at one of the saloon tables; "if you think the

animal's really injured, just put a reasonable price on him and we'll settle the matter amicably! "

"I'd best get in conferens with the hog first," Humferry says, "and then mebbe we kin fix on something that will suit the three of us. Because this hog was a plumb sens'tif varmint and his sufferings must of been intense — him bein' choused out'n town thataway with half Alma lookin' on! . . . He ain't a ordinary hog by no means — he's got a right interesting history attached to him! "

When Humferry says this Brad looked at him suspicious.

"If you're fixing to start out on one of them long-winded yarns of yourn," he says, "I'm goin' over to breakfast. And since Stub Whitson is sick abed today on account of a recent overdose of licker, perhaps Mr. Allen will mind bar till I get back. As a favor! "

"Shore! " I says. "And thank you kindly. I appreciate the favor."

So I ordered a drink on the house, because a bartender gits more trade in the long run by treating his customers every once in so often.

Then after Humferry had drunk his drink he begun glansing at the rafters absent-minded and clearing his throat like he was going to talk.

So the stranger feller says brisk:

"At the risk of offending you, Mr. Daggett, I must warn you that I can't give you but a few minutes at this time. I've got to make a trip to Mogollon — as soon as Mr. Thomas gets me a guide! "

"Why," says Humferry surprised, "didn't Brad tell you — I'm the feller he picked out! "

Well, for a minute the stranger looked right took aback. Then he riz up and says:

"If that's the case we won't have to waste any more time here. We can settle about the hog later. Let's go!"

But Humferry didn't move, just sat looking reflectful at the bottle I'd left on the table.

"I can't hardly go just yet, I'm afeared," he says; "my hoss ain't digested his breakfast, I don't reckon. Nor I ain't scursely up to the p'int myself. We'd best wait a drink or two."

So the stranger give a sigh and sat down again and ordered up and Humferry begun clearing his throat suggestive. But before he could get started on whatever 'twas he was fixing to reeveal, we heard a whoopin' and a yellin' from down the road and when we looked out we seen the Alma fellers ridin' back with the sheriff setting up in front and a rope tied around his arms and shoulders.

Brad come running over from the hotel and they boosted the sheriff down off his hoss and drug him in the saloon and everbody begun to talk at once about what they'd best do with him.

"We kotched him outside the town limits," Sim Wood says, "so they wasn't no violence did in Alma. Since we been back in town nobody's raised a hand agin him, nor he ain't made no hostile moves hisself."

"Did you all git your money?" Brad asked.

Sim was going to answer him but that's all the further he got, because the sheriff busted out and begun cussing Alma and everything in it right clever. Some of the cuss words he used was new and well chose and I wish I could of remembered them, but they come too fast.

Well, Brad got right riled, seemed like.

"You said enough," he come out savage, when the sheriff was winded. "I've been anxious to protect you from injury so far, not because I got any special interest

in that lump of dobey clay you insult the human countenance by callin' a face, but because being a servant of the county you represent a lot of better men than what you be. But now I'm agin you, and it's come to a p'int where I'm willin' to try out whose got the most influence over to Socorro — you or me! ”

The fellers all set up a cheerin' at this and some of them was for stringin' the sheriff up without no more words wasted, and the sheriff got plumb quiet. But when Brad saw they was gettin' their ropes off their saddles he stopped them.

“What about the money?” he asked. “That's a lot more important than this varmint's life.”

“He only had about half the money on him,” Sim says.

“That *chile*-picker which came out from Silver City with this minin' man must have had the balance — but he got away.”

“Did you find the option contracts that was stole from Allingham?” I asked.

“No,” says Sim, “I reckon the other fellow had them too. But his tracks were heading towards Mogollon when we lost them, so I wouldn't wonder if he'd be snoopin' round here again before long so we can make a clean-up.”

“Well,” Brad says, “the first thing is to dispose of this here sheriff pest. You'd best throw him in jail for the time being, till I can figure out the affare judicial.”

“Won't him and that pool gambler git into some devilment?” Sim asks doubtful.

“No,” I says, “because Allingham's broke jail.”

“That's good,” Brad put in quick, before nobody could make any objections; “it saves us the trouble of leaving him loose. As long as the sheriff's a pris'ner he's got no jurisdiction and Allingham's won his liberty by default.”

So nobody said anything against Brad's judgment only the sheriff, and he didn't count no longer. And I begun to feel right pleased the way things were working out, and went over to tell Allingham he was free, while the Almians were putting the sheriff in jail.

I'd mighty nigh forgotten about taking Allingham's clothes, being so apsorbed in the news I had to tell him, but when I seen him setting on the edge of the bed wropped up in one of them loon'tic quilts made of patches of different colored cloths, I remembered about the clothes. And I was kind of sorry I'd stayed so long over to the saloon.

Allingham didn't say nothing when I come in, just sat there looking at me plumb snaky. His face was right cold and his eyes was narrowed down till it looked like he was peeking through a couple of chinks in his forehead.

"Well," I says, "I been over to the saloon."

Then they was a brief pause.

"In your ramblings you didn't happen to run across an orphan suit of clothes, did you?" Allingham asked sarcastic.

Well, I started to tell him what made me take his clothes, but he broke in on me.

"Don't try to explain! If there's anything I hate worse than an underhanded action it's a poor excuse!"

"I got a good one," I says patient, "I was trying to save you from yourself, as the feller says. It was the only way I could think of to keep you from going out and getting jailed again."

"So you decided to think!" he says sneerin'.

Well, I couldn't immagin' what had come over Allingham. He seemed plumb unnatural. I never knowed him to get serious before about bein' irr'tated; but I could see from the

way he was acting that things had got beyond a joke. So I just says:

“ I ain’t never laid claim to be no mental giant, but I kin take a licking as lighthearted as the next man, if it comes to that.”

“ Good! ” says Allingham, throwing off his quilt, “ I’ll just let you prove your boast.”

So then we begun to quar’l.

When I said I could take a licking I wasn’t meaning that I expected to. As I’ve already mentioned, I’m right tough and hard to stop when I git going, and Allingham is more slenderer and don’t look like he could stand a grate deal of handling. And I wouldn’t of believed I’d git the worst of it — like I done. But fights ain’t fit with looks — at least this one wasn’t — and it taken only a short spell before I was convinsed I’d best save up what features I had left for the next time.

So I said I was satisfied and Allingham got off’n my ribs, where he was setting at the moment, and then I wiped the stanes of combat, as they call it, off’n my face. All of which would come off by wiping, that is. And then I took my eggsit from the room without no more words said.

I was easing myself out of the front door when Ruby come through the best room and handed me a letter that had been sent on from Vegas where I had wrote them to forward my mail to Alma.

“ Here’s a missive from that girl of yours, I reckon,” she says; “ the handwriting looks real loving.”

Then she noticed my face and let out a lite screech like women does when they’re surprised.

“ What have you been doing to yourself? ” she asks.

“ Nothing,” I says, “ it’s a little thing Allingham composed. We had an out over my taking his clothes.”

So Ruby wouldn't have it but that I should let her put cold water and arnicky onto my face. Seems like gals is plumb fond of puttering round over somebody who's hurted thataway. Nor I wasn't so sot agin it this once, neither.

"I'm afraid I'm to blame for this trouble," she says when I told her how the fight had come about. "After you'd gone this morning I went up to Allingham's room and asked him through the door if he wanted any breakfast, and he was so fresh I offered to lend him a Mother Hubbard so he could walk out and take the air. Then it came to me all of a sudden how funny the whole thing was, and I began to laugh. And I wouldn't be surprised if he was angry."

"No," I says, "nor either would I. But I'm glad you got a laugh out'n the affare — I ain't found it overly droll myself."

So then I rubbed the arnicky out of my eyes and went over to the saloon to get something stren'thening, because I felt kind of puny.

Humferry and the stranger feller were still there, getting started on their trip to the mine, and some of the Almians were setting around talking about the pleasure they'd had putting the sheriff in jail and getting enough money to buy drinks with again.

So I didn't say nothing only ordered a drink and give Brad the outlines of what had happened between me and Allingham, to explain why he couldn't reckernize me first off. But I hadn't hardly got started on the yarn when we heard a stomping on the porch and directly Miz Daggett busted in, holding Humferry's hog in one hand and the stranger feller's bulldog in the other. And all of 'em talkin' to once in their own languages.

Humferry's eyes bugged out when he seen them, and he turned right pale and inched over behind the stove.

"Well," says Miz Daggett, glansing at him plumb vicious, "what you got to say for yourself, you little lizzard, you?"

"I ain't talkin' none for publication," says Humferry, and flang a glanse at the window behind him; "but I'd ought to have a equal right to our livestock, if they's sech a thing as law in Alma."

Then Miz Daggett made a step or two in his direction and Humferry dived out'n the window right agyle and ran around in front where his hoss was and waited thar, all set to go.

Miz Daggett looked around the room hostile and give the bulldog a shake.

"And who claims this varmint?" she says.

"It's mine," says the stranger feller right plucky. "I was under the impression that the hog belonged to Mr. Daggett, and he and I have been conferring on the amount of damages owing. But since it appears to be your property, ma'am, I can only ask you to forgive me and let me shoot the dog and pay you what you think proper recompense for your distress of mind."

Well, Miz Daggett smiled at the feller right pleasant and tossed him the dog keerless.

"I wouldn't hurt him none," she says, "he's had a right hard day. He chowded this ornery hog of mine nigh half way home. I met them on the way in, looking for the hog. As for damages, I reckon a dollar would be about right, if you could spare it. I wouldn't ask that only the ins'dent was right hard on a guest of mine stayin' at the ranch, who was fixin' to come in to Alma with me this mornin' and now she's got to ride in alone—a Miss Hallock —"

“ Miss Hallock! ” busts in the feller eager, “ Miss Hallock’s been staying with you? ”

“ Shore,” says Miz Daggett, “ for a couple of nights now. She figured I could give her more protection than she’d be li’ble to find here in Alma. . . . Come to think of it, she was expectin’ to meet a friend here — mebbe you’re him? ”

“ Yes, yes,” the feller says, “ but she was to reach here tomorrow — in a car — ”

“ I dunno nothin’ about that,” says Miz Daggett, “ but she’s on the road now and she’ll be in before a grate while. You kin get the rights of the affare from her, more’n likely. . . . And about them damages — ! ”

Well, the stranger give Miz Daggett a dollar quick and rushed out’n the saloon and him and Humferry rode off up the road. And Miz Daggett moved to the bar and says:

“ I’ll trouble you for a drop of licker, Mr. Thomas! ”

Then I started over to tell Allingham about Miss Hallock being found, but I remembered that him and me was on the outs, so I sat down and read the letter Ruby had give me, instead.

CHAPTER XXII

ALLINGHAM'S DEBUT

I WAS glad the letter from my gal had come, because I wasn't feelin' right high-sperrited at the moment and I needed something to brace me up like. Brad's licker had kind of petered out on me, but I thought, here, this letter will do the trick if anything will. So I sat down by myself in a cornder and prepared to enjoy things and opened up the envelope and this is what I read:

DEAR MR. ALLEN:

I can't call you Lem no longer because I just got ingaged to another feller. He works in the livery stable here in Tulsa. He ain't so amiable as you was the last time I seen you and told you the wedding would have to be put off indefinite, but he's a reliable money maker, which is more important in the long run. So can you blame me?

Yours lately,
LIZA.

Well, you can jedge how I felt — or mebbe you can't, because 'twas right unusual of a sensation. Here me and this gal had wrote I dunno how many letters during the last three years, with the object mattermony, and now the affare was all broke off in one short epistel. It seemed right shiftless, for a fact.

I hadn't hardly got things shifted round in my mind so they set comfortable, when Ruby put her head in the saloon door and beckoned to me and I went out to see

what she wanted. I thought some of telling her about the news in my letter, but then I thought No, she's been a good friend to me, so far, and I wouldn't want she should suffer none over my pers'nal disappointments. So I just asked her what all was up.

"Your late friend Allingham is anxious to see you," she says; "he's waiting over in the hotel parlor."

So with that she run back and I walked behind more slow, thinking. I was thinking that I was broke and out of work and had lost a partner and my best gal to once and didn't have no encouraging prospects to fall back onto. And I begun to wonder if they was more trouble waiting for me in the hotel, because I was coming round to the notion that this was li'ble to be a unlucky day for me.

When I entered the best room I looked round and seen somebody settin' by the window, and I says, "Excuse me, ma'am!" because I thought it was a stranger woman. Then when she uttered a noath I looked closer and seen it was only Allingham, dressed up in a gingham dress and looking right redic'lous.

I would have laughed only me and Allingham was on the outs, so I stood looking towards him and waiting for him to say something. Nor Allingham didn't laugh neither. He just sat glansing at me out'n one eye, the other being closed up where I'd reached him once in the argyment we'd had.

Then presently he says:

"Lem, you've got a true friend in that girl Ruby!"

"I kin do with a friend, I reckon," I says short, because I wasn't sure yet whether Allingham was still on the prod or not.

"She's just favored me with a few salient remarks concerning a recent outbreak of mine," he went on, "and in

consequence I've come to the conclusion that I owe you an apology. I was in the wrong."

Well, I was glad to hear him own up so frank, but still my face was hurting right constant and my feelings also, and I figured they wasn't no use makin' up too quick — till I'd had relief anyhow. So I says:

"As far as what you done goes, it ain't the first time I been whipped, by no means. Nor I ain't one to hold a grudge agin nobody because they got the best of me; it's been one of my experiences that hating a feller is a plumb wearing an' wasteful pastime and they ain't nothing to it. Also as for what you said, words ain't never raised no bumps that I've heard tell of. . . . But what you thought was different. You thought I was ornery and low-down enough to steal your clothes just for to make a fool out'n you, when I was only trying to keep you from getting into trouble. And I can't go on being partners with nobody who thinks I'm that particular kind of a knothed — because I ain't."

With that Allingham helt out his hand and says:

"Spoken like a gentleman, Lem! Let's make it up! "

"No," I says, "I ain't no gentleman, and you know it. Nor I ain't right certain I'd want to be one neither. Because most of the gentlemen I've met up with are just fellers with money enough to hide their mental poverty and suffishen polish to cover their nachral lack of good manners. They's a sayin' that clothes don't make a man, but it's my experience they make the best part of a gentleman. Because a feller owns a gold watch don't mean his heart's made of the same metal, and if his eppidermus is kep' fragrant it don't follow his soul's got the same enticin' odor. Why, I've run acrost more'n one settler in this Western country that never had a bath in his life — 'less'n it rained or he

slipped on a log and fell in the crick — and yet who had more gentle thoughts and feelin's than the major'ty of these here fashion-plated fellers who'd ruther miss their pass to heaven than their mornin's tub. . . . No, I don't claim to be no gentleman — but I aim to be a man, and to git treated like one! ”

I was gettin' right het up; yet I found talkin' loud and fast sort of eased me. Then whilst I was busy catching up with my breath Allingham give a right nice smile and says:

“ I hope you've got it all out of your system, Lem, because if you don't shake hands now and tell me the whole sad episode is forgotten I'm going to step out and take you to a cleaning you'll remember all your days! ”

So he put out his hand again and I figured mebbe I was taking the affare too serious, so I shaken his hand a time or two and says:

“ Well, we'll put it down to profits and loss.” Then I says: “ How come you to be dressed up foolish thataway? Didn't Ruby show you where your clothes was? ”

“ I'm doing penance,” he says solemn; “ Ruby and I agreed I'd get my clothes when I made it up with you.”

So I seen why he was arguring so strong.

Then I was just going to tell him the news about the stranger gal being located and everything, when I seen him staring out of the window plumb surprised. And when I looked up the road I seen Miss Hallock and the stranger feller riding along in the direction of the Daggett claim with Humferry trailin'. So I told Allingham what Miz Daggett had said about the gal stayin' with her. But I didn't know how come she'd got back to the claim after we'd seen her leaving that night, without us knowing anything about it.

Allingham didn't pay much attention to what I was saying, because about then the party we was watching come to the forks where the Mogollon road branches off east and the stranger feller stood a moment talking and then leaned over and give the gal a right affecshunate kiss and then him and Humferry rid off toward the hills and Miss Hallock cantered up to the hotel. Then she got down from her hoss and we seen where Ruby had run out to meet her at the entrance gate.

Allingham seemed in a daze like, which was why he didn't make no move toward safety, I reckon, whilst he had the chance. And before I happened to remember that the only door to the room we was in faced on the hall where the vis'tor was heading towards, we heard footsteps coming up the hall.

"What shall I do?" asked Allingham, plumb nervous.

So I couldn't help but laugh, because here he'd been chasing that gal over half the southwestern portion of the country and now when at last he had a chance to come in contack with her he was tryin' his best to sidestep the meeting. But I didn't hardly blame him; he wasn't dressed so's to make a hit at no coming-out party, for a fact.

So I just says:

"Well, you might set down and arrange your skirts tasty and be talkin' about hairpins or somethin' when they come in. Then after I've stayed a minute or so for politeness I'll just get up and leave you have a good gossip with the other gals."

I believe Allingham would have made a pass at me, he was that riled; but just then somebody knocked light on the best room door. And about the same time Allingham seen a closet on one side of the room and jumped in quick and

closed the door easy behind him a second before Ruby and the stranger gal entered.

"This is Mr. Lem Allen!" Ruby says when they seen me, and Miss Hallock smiled and says: "Why, we're old friends, aren't we, Mr. Allen?" and put out her hand.

So I shaken it a time or two and says: "Yes, ma'am."

Then I says: "Please be seated, Miss Hallock!" and pushed up a chair for her to set in. And as luck would have it, the chair come to rest a foot or so inbefront of the closet where Allingham had seeked sanktum, as they call it.

I noticed that Ruby was looking round the room inquirin' like she wondered why the gatherin' was incompleted, but she didn't say nothing. Nor either did I — just waited.

"Well, Mr. Allen," says Miss Hallock after a brief pause, "it's nice to see you again. While I think of it, I want to thank you for not saying, 'Isn't the world a small place!'"

"I'm aware it ain't," I says, "because once I studied a geography book. . . . But it's funny we should meet-up like this in Alma. The laws of chances was all agin it. And the nature of the locality."

"Hush!" put in Ruby. "Don't begin running down Alma. It isn't such a backward place as all that — you can start for most anywhere from here!"

Then Miss Hallock laughed, sort of, and smiled some at Ruby, and Ruby smiled back. It's curious how two women can get acquainted enough to be on smiling terms so quick. But mebbe they don't really get acquainted, but only pretend to — I dunno.

I was fixing to put Ruby right on her statement about getting away from Alma easy, because if it hadn't of took money to travel Allingham and me would likely have been somewheres else by now. But then I happened to rec'lect you mustn't never talk about not having no money in

comp'ny. You got to let on you're rich long as you're in the best room, so nobody's feelings is tore by being sorry for a feller.

So I made alterations in the subject and says:

"We was looking for you in Alma that night you left Miz Daggett's, Miss Hallock. An' we scoured the country for your hoss's hoof-prints next day. We couldn't figure what had happened — 'twas like a mist'ry."

Then Miss Hallock laughed and says:

"I'm sorry you were put to any trouble. But what happened was simple enough. I wanted to see more of Mrs. Daggett — after that first glimpse — so I waited down the road a while till you and your friends had ridden past, then returned to the cabin. I thought at first I'd ride in next day, but Mrs. Daggett wouldn't hear of it. So, as I was a little ahead of my schedule and knew that I'd have to wait a few days anyway till my mining friend arrived, I stayed on. . . . I'm sure, by the way, I'll never regret the experience."

Well, nobody said nothing for a minute after that and they was a brief silence, and then into the middle of the silence there come a sound from the closet where Allingham was hid. It sounded like somebody was sneezin' with their head under a couple of feet of water. Muffelt, I mean.

"Why, what's that?" says Miss Hallock, looking around quick.

"It's just a rat, I reckon!" I says.

"I never heard a rat sneeze before," Miss Hallock says suspicious.

"No, ma'am," I says, "nor either did I, but on the other hand I never heard them denied the accomplishment. There's a lot about them little animals we ain't learned yet."

So Miss Hallock looked kind of funny, but she didn't

say no more about the noise. Then after a minute she asked:

"How is your novel coming on, Mr. Allen?"

"Well," I says, "it ain't been brought plumb up to date. A good many things has happened recent that I ain't had the heart to put down yet. I'm waitin' awhile first, because they's a lot of ins'dents a feller don't enjoy dwellin' on at the time they breaks, but which he likes to remember later on, when he gets used to their being safe behind."

With that Miss Hallock laughed and asked me:

"And what's become of your friend — Halligan, was that his name?"

"Allingham," Ruby broke in. "It's a good thing his wife didn't hear you — I expect she's right proud of her title!"

When Ruby says this Miss Hallock's eyebrows sort of lifted up surprised.

"Oh — is he married?"

Well, I was shore hacked. I didn't know what to say hardly, because the gals was both looking at me and I ain't right handy lying to women under them circumstances.

So I just says diplomatic:

"I heard him claim as much — though I never seen his wife myself."

"They may be living separate," Ruby suggeded; "I wouldn't blame the poor soul — this Allingham doesn't look like a man who'd be easy to get along with."

So nobody said nothing and they was a brief pause and I begun to get right fidgetty. I dunno why 'tis, but often when some of the people in a crowd are thinking about something the others don't know nothing about, seems like the air gets plumb full of uneasiness. And just as this idee struck me in the present instance, there come another

sneeze from the closet, only this time it was loud and clear like it scorned disguising.

Miss Hallock jumped up and started to remark about it, but about then the closet door swang open and Allingham and his dresses crawled out right red in the face and trying to look dignified, which they didn't by no means.

Well, sir, my throat began to tickle me till I had to cough once or twice, and when I looked at Ruby she was laughing plumb uncontrollable. But Miss Hallock squenched a smile and glansed at Allingham right hard.

I figured mebbe she wanted to say something to Allingham and couldn't because she hadn't never been made acquainted with him. So I says:

"This here's Mr. Allingham, Miss Hallock! My partner — which I've told you about occasional."

"And what do you mean, Mr. Allingham," she says cold, "by this untimely intrusion?"

"Yes," Ruby breaks in, "it's a very peculiar way for a married husband to be acting, if you should ask me. . . . I believe your wife should be told!"

"Damn my wife!" says Allingham earnest, and with that he walked out'n the room tripping over his skirts as he went. And I thought them gals would choke theirselves to death laughing.

So I excused myself from the room and got Allingham's clothes out of the hall closet where I'd put them, and went up to our room where I found him cussin' to hisself convincing and throwing Ruby's things around regardless. It was funny though, he ca'amed down a lot quicker than he had when I hid his clothes, though I'd have thought he'd of felt worse now than then.

Finally he began to laugh at hisself, which showed he was natural again.

"I reckon I was right odd-looking — coming out of that closet like a Jack-in-the-box! "

"Odd ain't exactly the right word," I says, "and Jack's a feller's name, ain't it? . . . So we got to liminate that too, because you was scursely a fine figure of a man at the moment."

But I don't believe Allingham heard me.

He had a sort of simple, faraway look on his face like he was thinking of happy days.

"Miss Hallock is even more attractive than I imagined," he says dreemy-like. "To think I've met her at last! "

"Yes," I says, "but to think *how* you met her! "

Well, he didn't even get riled at that, which shows the condition he was in.

"My début wasn't staged in the most happy vein, it's true — but I couldn't go that closet a minute longer. I could hear my heart beating against the front and back at one and the same time. And whichever one of Brad's daughters has the job of dusting those shelves is a slacker. It got so finally I had to either sneeze or stop breathing. So I snoze."

"I heard you — and so did Miss Hallock. I wouldn't wonder if she was right put out — the way you scared her."

"Nonsense, it just aroused her interest. . . . Wait till I get my proper attire on and a chance to talk and I'll soon make up the ground I've lost."

"Well," I says, "if I ain't mistook you'll have to show some speed to cut out that stranger feller. Today's the second time we've seen him kissing of her, ain't it? "

So that kind of got to Allingham.

"You should follow the realistic school of writing," he says short, "you're so fond of gloating over the more horrible details of existence."

So I didn't say no more then, because I could see Allingham was irr'tated.

CHAPTER XXIII

A SOUND OF REVELRY

WHEN Humferry and the stranger feller set out for Mogollon they had expected to get back the same day, because the claim wasn't more'n twelve or fifteen miles distant from Alma. But they was gone overnight; and next morning a telephone message come saying they'd been detained and would be in that day. And as this was the day Ruby had fixed on for her dance she was right pleased that Miss Hallock and her friend would be on hand to enjoy the entertainment.

Allingham and me learnt of these events at breakfast, when Ruby spoke up cheerful and says:

"I suppose you men have been impatiently waiting for the *baile* I promised you! But you won't be kept in suspense any longer — tonight's the night!"

I must have looked right discouraged, because Ruby glanced at me funny and asked:

"You know how to dance, don't you?"

"Yes," I says, "but I ain't parshul to the pastime. I kin rec'lect yet the time I first learnt; 'twas back in Oklahoma and how it come about was the local desp'rado got lit up one night and begun pumping a curtain of fire, as they call it, around the bottom of my limbs: and right there was when I found out I could dance. But I didn't enjoy it at the time nor I ain't ever fell in love with the habit since."

"Well," Ruby says firm, "you've got to sacrifice your feelings tonight on the altar of Terpsichore, which if you're not acquainted with her is the muse of the dance! "

"That's another thing besides her name I've got agin her then," I says, and Miss Hallock laughed. So then Allingham laughed too, and Ruby knowed from me making a joke I'd give in and was just trying to distract attention from the fact.

Well, Allingham begun talking to Miss Hallock after that, because it seems she didn't hold it agin him none that he'd give her a chance to laugh at him the day before, and so she was right pleasant-spoke and told Allingham about her friend the stranger feller not getting back and how she was waiting for him and all. And Allingham tried for to find out what was the relation between them two, without actually coming out and asking her, but she didn't give him no satisfaction on that head.

Then Ruby says:

"We've got to arrange for music the first thing. I suppose we'll have to fall back on Humferry Daggett and his fiddle, as usual. I wish you two men would sort of keep an eye on him when he gets in from Mogollon — at least till the dance begins. We can't hardly get along without him."

Well, we agreed to that and then made the rest of the plans and finally got to work, because dancing wasn't all we was scheduled for, by no means.

We spent mighty nigh the whole day fixing up the schoolhouse for the dance. First off we had to take all the furniture out. Then we had to whittle taller candles all over the floor and stomp on the taller and shuffle it around with our feet till the boards was right slick. And we put piñon limbs and scrub oak leaves on the walls for decora-

tions, and hung up a lot of coal oil lamps for luminative purposes.

Along about the middle of the forenoon a feller rode in to town, and who should it be but Dingbat Jones, the trapper, on his other hoss. He'd come after the animal he'd lent me, he claimed, and old Hosford Hipple's roan, which Allingham had hired. We were right glad to see Dingbat, because it took the responsibility of feedin' the hosses off'n our hands; and if we ever got in a position to leave Alma we knowed we could hire other mounts. So we told Dingbat about the dance and he let on he'd take it in, and got down off his hoss and help us with his advice.

Then later in the day Humferry showed up. He wouldn't say nothing much about the outcome of the mine inspection, just hinted that the stranger feller, who'd gone over to the hotel to talk with Miss Hallock, had some information to pass us when he got a chance to talk with us private. But when Humferry learnt that Ruby wanted him to play the fiddle at the dance he got right important and wouldn't do no work hardly at all, but stood around bossin' the job because he claimed he couldn't run no risk of cripplin' his musician's hands.

The only time he stopped bragging on his playing was when Miz Daggett rode in, late in the afternoon. And when we seen old Hosford Hipple's daughter Loosy ridin' along with her we was plumb surprised, nor we couldn't immagine what brung Loosy clean down from Springerville, unless it was the roan hoss Dingbat had said he was after. We would have asked, only they didn't stop at the schoolhouse but went on over to the hotel, which was gittin' full of folks, because all afternoon fellers and gals had been drifting in from Mogollon and Glenwood and Meader's Crossin' and the ranches for thirty or forty mile around,

till Alma looked plumb unnatural. You couldn't walk mor'n a hundred yards, hardly, without seeing somebody.

Both saloons did a rushing business in drinks and seegars and the gen'ral store sold more black evenin' shirts and neck handkerchiefs and cattridges and them lilac-colored elastics with rosettes on them which the sports wear to hold up their shirt sleeves, than it had done since we come. And Dingbat, being broke, let on he was a barber and made nigh onto four dollars cash money by disfiguring the trustin' countenances of fellers who believed him.

Finally the grate moment come, as you might say, and found all the fellers hangin' round the door of the school-house, which was lit up also. Humferry stood on the platform at one end of the hall, tuning up his fiddle and plastering his bow with rossin and his insides with Brad's private stock, which had been loaned him free for the occasion. And he was shore lookin' hotty and untrampled.

Presently the gals come over from the hotel in a crowd, and Miz Daggett follered in another crowd by herself. They was most of them gigglin' and making keerless talk like they wasn't aware somebody was waiting for them. But when the grand march struck up they begun to notice the fellers, which come out'n their trance sudden and choosed partners, and then we all lined up and Humferry specktorated on his hands and clamped down on his fiddle with his chin and waved his bow graceful and then they began what the pote calls a sound of deviltry by night.

Allingham had tried to git Miss Hallock for a partner, but the stranger feller beat him out of the chance, so he danced with Brad's eldest daughter Opal — I reckon because she was looking downhearted also. And I was so busy watching him that one of the Alma fellers got to Ruby ahead of me, though I figured that as long as she'd

been the one to git me in the notion of dancing she ought to shoulder some of the responsibility. Then I run into old Hosford's daughter Loosy and in the excitement I asked her would she dance and she didn't make no objections, so we started in.

For a spell I kept my mind on how Loosy told me to turn and all, so we didn't talk much, but as soon as I thought of it I asked her how she happened to come to Alma.

"Was your Paw getting anxious about his hoss?" I asked.

"No," she says, "I don't reckon it bothered him a grate deal. He's dead."

"Well!" I says surprised.

"Yes," Loosy says, "he had a suddent stroke. . . . And since he left consid'able property and me being a lone woman, I decided to look up Dingbat and git him sober and let him think he's running the hotel. I may have to marry him, for looks' sake, but life is full of compromises!"

"Well!" I says again.

So we didn't say no more then, just romped round a spell, and presently Dingbat bumped into us and asked Loosy to dance and she said she was agreeable. I reckon she wanted a chance to break the news to Dingbat about the change in his future plans. Nor I don't immagine he was put out when she told him about it, neither, because old Hosford must have been right well fixed, and Loosy herself couldn't be called a plumb cripplin' incumbrance on the property.

It was three or four dances more before I could get to dance with Ruby, so in the meanwhile I hung around the edges and watched the dancing. It was a right stimulin' sight, for a fact. All the gals was dressed up neat and

wore smiles and a becoming flush of excitement beside their lingerings and such. And the fellers was excited too, most of them, because after they'd made two or three trips over to the saloon they begun to get an idee that some partic'ler gal was keering about them for theirselves alone, and not just because they didn't step on her feet.

Brad Thomas was happier than I'd ever seen him before. It was a grate night for him, he says, between sobs. Besides the extry profits at the saloon and gen'ral store and the new stock of money coming in to Alma from outside, two of his daughters, Pearl and Emrald, was ingaged before the evening was over, and another, Beryl, got into a understanding with a feller which kept her good-natured for three months or better.

Allingham didn't seem to be enjoying hisself, though, during the early part of the evening. But after he'd underwent a dance with Miz Daggett and no harm done he finally 'secured a waltz with Miss Hallock, and peartened up consid'able. And him and her begun by doing a lot of fancy steps, dipping and gliding and such; but when the rest began to stop dancing and gathered round to watch how it was did, they just plain waltzed agin.

At len'th I got a dance with Ruby.

"Why have you been neglecting me all evening?" she asked severe.

"Because I didn't have no stepladder to climb over the heads of the fellers clustered around you with," I says, and she looked right pleased.

It's funny, when a gal asks you some foolish question she already knows the answer to, they always like it if you tell them a lie and pretend you think it's the truth. They're right simple thataway.

CHAPTER XXIV

LOVE AND WAR

WHEN me and Ruby started to dance we found the dance was a Lancers dance. Sim Wood got up beside Humferry and called out the figures whilst the dance was going on. Some of the things he called out he remembered, and some he made up. But you couldn't tell the difference hardly.

He begun by hollering out for the first figure like this:

Take your partner and pat her on the head;
If she don't like roast beef give 'er corn bread.

Then next time he says:

Dance your cornder and dance it well;
Swing your pardner and swing like —

Sim didn't say hell right out, because on account of the women bein' there, but everybody knowed what he meant so they figured it was humorous. And Sim had a lot of other ones, too, though they wasn't no sense to the most of them. They was just made up to match the dancing.

After the dance we were right hot, so Ruby and me had some lemonade. Then I says:

"I wouldn't wonder if 'twas cooler outside. Supposing we take a stroll and git some fresh air!"

"Is that what all these fellers who've been strolling out every few minutes have been getting?" asked Ruby.

"I dunno," I says, "we might go and find out."

So Ruby didn't make no objections, and we strolled up and down the road a spell.

Then I says:

"If you got a few minutes to spare we might climb up on the sawdust pile and see if it looks the same as it did the other night."

Ruby laughed and says:

"I believe you're crazy! "

"Well," I says, "if a feller don't act crazy once in a while he don't get the full benefits of being sensible the rest of the time."

So we started for the sawdust pile.

We found it was about the same as when we were there before, only the moon looked bigger and clearer. We could see the saloon lights shining sociable a hundred yards west, and north some distance was the schoolhouse and the dance going on. The jail, which was close by to the northeast, between us and the mesa, was right dark and gloomy compared with. And I begun to feel sorry for the sheriff, for all he had acted so ornery. It must be right solitary for him alone in jail thataway, I figured.

Then all of a sudden I was glad me and Ruby was apart from the dance, out here where 'twas cool and there weren't no people nor loud noises.

"It seems redicklus," I says finally, "all them folks wasting their time jumping round over yonder."

I says this because we could see their heads through the open windows, floating apast foolish-like.

"It may look ridiculous," Ruby says, "but it's not, by any means. Nor those folks aren't wasting their time, either. The main reason for the dance, which is to get a lot of men and girls that are miserable by themselves mixed up together, is being accomplished successfully."

"Well," I says, "you may be right. It's funny though, I believe I'd ruther be out here with you than in the bunch yonder."

So Ruby kind of sniffed.

"I don't see anything so singular in that — unless you mean you should have your fiancée here instead of me."

"That there affare is broke off," I says.

So Ruby looked right surprised.

"You don't mean it! And who broke it off?"

"I did," I says; "I didn't make enough money for it to run along on. So the gal's going to marry a good provider."

Well, Ruby didn't say nothing for a spell, so I couldn't make out whether she was sorry for me or not. She just sat with her head turned away, glansing at the mesa and the Mogollon mountains which you could see black against the eastern skyline like some jagged-toothed feller had taken a bite out'n the edge of the firm'ment.

Then finally Ruby says:

"I suppose that's why you've been drinking so constant the last day or two!"

"No," I says, "'twas partly because Brad give us credit and partly, I reckon, because I was kind of lonesome."

At that Ruby turned round and smiled friendly.

"I know what that feeling is — quite well. Especially since I came back from teaching school at Silver City last fall. Sometimes I get so lonesome I could bust out crying — only there's nobody to cry to. . . . At least there hasn't been to date. . . . Do you get lonesome often?"

"All the time most — except when I'm in a jam. Because seems 's if a feller ain't got no time to worrit about his feelings when he's in trouble."

"You ought to get married. Then you wouldn't ever be lonesome."

"Well," I says, "I didn't mean trouble was always preferable to lonesomeness. Only for a change like."

So Ruby looked at the mesa reflectful and they was a brief pause.

Then I inched a mite closer to her and says:

"But speakin' of marriage — I'd sure like to get a chance to marry some gal like you, Ruby!"

"Oh," she says, "that ought not to be so hard. I'm just an ordinary sort of girl."

"Them's the kind makes the best wives," I says encouraging, and with that Ruby set about a foot furtherer away and seemed right put out about something.

I wondered if 'twas because I was springing the question on her too suddent. Then I remembered what Allingham had told me once when I asked him what was the best way to tell if a gal liked a feller or not. He claimed you should put your arm around the gal and give her a kiss and if she didn't jab you with a hatpin or holler Murder it was a shore sign she favored your attentions.

Well, Ruby didn't have no hat on and there wasn't no off'cers of the law nigh except the sheriff, who wasn't dangerous, so I figured I wouldn't be taking no grate chances trying Allingham's system; but yet I didn't somehow keer to make the attempt. So finally to be on the safe side I slid one arm around Ruby cautious, like I had to lean on it to keep from falling in the sawdust.

She didn't make no outcryin', so I says:

"Ruby, if I could find a gal like what we was talking about, do you reckon I could git her to marry me?"

"Not unless you asked her, I don't imagine!" says Ruby short.

So then I drawed a deep breath and made the plunge.

"Well, supposing you was that gal, Ruby — would you marry me?"

"If I did," says Ruby sharp, "there's one thing sure, I wouldn't ever have to worry over your making any reckless motions. A rain storm would never be so sudden or unexpected but what you'd have your umbrella and gum boots handy, I'll gamble! "

"I generally wear a slicker," I says, "it covers a feller more complete."

At that Ruby laughed helpless like she didn't have no more argyments, so I knowed I'd won. And I was just going to seal the bargain, as they call it, when Ruby stopped me and says:

"There's another thing's got to be settled before we can call it a deal. I wouldn't think of marrying you unless you quit drinking. Because in the first place I know too much about the composition of Pop's licker, and in the second place I'm of a right jealous nature and don't aim to have any rivals for your affections in the family circle."

"I've done quit drinking from this minute, Ruby," I says. "When do you reckon we kin be married? "

"Don't ask so many questions," she says, "it's my turn. Tell me, am I the first girl you never really understood? "

I was going to tell her No, because I never understood none of them, when they get talking; but just then I seen something right spooky-looking, moving out on the mesa, and before I could catch myself I give a startle and Ruby's head slipped off my shoulder and she mighty nigh fell over backwards.

"Well! " she says irr'table, "the next time I get engaged I'll sure pick out a feller can support the girl of his choice better than you — what made you jump that way? "

"They's somebody coming! "

"Supposing there is? If they see us they'll probably get over the shock before a great while. And if the worst

comes to the worst we'll say we're thinking of getting married; that makes everything right except poverty and poor clothes! ”

“ Shish! ” I says nervous. “ That ain't nobody from the dance, it's strangers! They don't look like they was up to no good, neither.”

Then I pointed out where sev'el fellers were crawling in off the mesa toward the jail 's if they didn't want nobody to see them.

“ Lie down flat! ” says Ruby hasty, pulling me down on the sawdust pile. Then she whispers: “ It's a bunch of Mexicans come to get the sheriff out of jail. But I didn't expect them till later.”

“ What! ” I says surprised. “ Are they friends of yours? ”

“ Of course not! . . . Pop learned about their plans from one of his coffee-hued *amigos*, and since this jail-breaking was planned for the night of my dance he let me stage-manage the defense.”

So I was right disappointed.

“ Why,” I says, “ if I'd knowed about it we could have been waiting here for them bandits and got every last one of 'em before they realized what was up! ”

“ Yes, and leave us women out of it, I suppose! . . . I've got things fixed better than that. I told Stub Whitson about it, so he could be a hero and get a chance at Opal—who he's soft on. He's to ride out with some of the boys and come in on the outlaws' rear when the action starts. In the meantime there's a bunch at the saloon and several at the dance hiding their guns under their coats. As soon as they hear the alarm they'll join forces and take the Mexicans from this side.”

“ And who's to give the alarm? ”

At that Ruby frowned reflectful.

"I was. But I didn't expect them so soon. It looks like they had the jump on us."

With that she peeked over the edge of the sawdust pile a minute and then drawed back and turned around to me.

"They're close to the jail now and in a few minutes they'll have the sheriff. But by that time you've got to have slid down on the off side of this pile and reached the saloon and started back with the boys there on a high lope. Then we'll see! "

"How about your coming too?" I asked doubtful, because I didn't like the idee of Ruby staying there alone thataway.

"Don't talk foolish," she says, pulling a Colt's out'n her clothes. "I wouldn't miss any part of this jam for a fortune! And if you don't move along quick on your errand you can put wedding bells clean out of your head. The one particular thing I demand in any husband of mine is instant and unquestioning obedience! "

Well, I seen it wasn't no use arguring no longer, so I slipped off the south side of the sawdust pile and legged it over to the saloon about as fast as the Lord would let me.

I hadn't hardly reached it when I heard a shot or two in the direction where I'd left Ruby, and I was sure scairt because I figured some of them Mexicans must have found her there. So I stopped short and run back faster'n I'd come. And about the same time the saloon door swang open and a bunch of fellers come bustin' out hell bent for trouble and follered where they heard me hollering.

I reckon they must of heard the shots up at the dance hall too, because a shouting begun there and another bunch broke out from the hall and started running towards the scene of action with a large white figure that looked like

Miz Daggett in the front ranks, holding onto her skirts with one hand and swinging a chair round her head with the other and her voice rising plumb triumphant above all the rest of the clammer. And I thought to myself, God help them pore misguided Mexicans when she gits to them!

I dunno whether 'twas Miz Daggett's screechin' or just gen'ral prudence made the Mexicans move, but when I and the fellers from the saloon reached the sawdust pile we couldn't see no bandits at all. I was looking for Ruby more particular, though, and just then I seen her where I'd left here on top of the pile, jumping up and down excited and waving her gun towards the hotel.

"Yonder they go!" she hollers. "They've got the sheriff out and they're after their hosses. They must have left them in the corral back of the house."

So everybody started off again in the direction where she was pointing, only me, and I waited till she got down from the sawdust pile so we could run along together.

"I was afeared you was hurted when I heard them shots," I says.

"Sho!" says Ruby. "'Twas just that they worked quicker than I expected, so I shot off my gun to hurry our fellers up. I wonder where Stub is — it'll be a pity if he misses it!"

But Stub didn't miss nothing. By the time we got nigh the hotel we heard hosses galloping in from all sides and fellers yelling and emptying their guns at the Mexicans. The Mexicans was replying earnest and trying to get on their hosses and they was right smart of a jam for a spell.

Ruby give me her gun and a handful of cattridges, but us fellers on foot kept away from the center of the melee because they was so many fellers shooting and all. Only Miz Daggett, when she seen two or three of the Mexicans

about to get mounted, lost control of her prudens and run in and knocked a hoss on the head with her chair so that he fell down unconscious, and then snatched the Mexican off his back and swang him round her head and dropped the other Mexicans out'n their saddles like they was apples on a lim.

"I declare," says Brad admiringly, "if I had about ten like that there woman I'd go down and get myself elected President of Mexico. There wouldn't be nothing to it."

Finally the fellers on hossback, which Stub was handling, closed in, and the remaining Mexicans was rounded up and hogtied; and the affare was history. Nor they weren't any casualties at all, only four or five of the Mexicans kilt and sev'el of the Alma fellers had slight wounds. And Miz Daggett was plumb out of breath.

But she come round in time, though she couldn't talk above a whisper for a week or so. And she was right amiable with Humferry for about the same len'th of time. So he says.

Well, when things got quieted down everybody begun talking about the fight and what they'd done and how heroic Stub had been, and Opal jumped out at the psychic moment and flang her arms around his neck and Brad didn't make no objections, only looked the other way.

And then Humferry come running up and told how he'd been guarding the jail agin another surprise attack, and the stranger feller and Miss Hallock says how thrillin' it had all been, and Allingham let on he was right riled nobody'd told him before so's he could of had his guns with him and been a hero too, and Ruby looked plumb proud on account of her arranging the affare and in short we had a right enjoyable evening for the balance of the night. Before we started up the dance again we throwed the sheriff and the

rest of the live Mexicans in jail till it had been decided what to do with them permanent. The dead ones we put to one side.

And the only unlucky part of it, when we got to thinking it over, was that that Mexican lawyer Sena, which had took our mine options, didn't show up among the kilt or captured. But they wasn't nothing we could do about it but be sorry. Mebbe it was fate — I dunno.

CHAPTER XXV

KNOTS BEGIN TO LOOSEN

THE stranger feller had passed us the word on the night of the dance that he wanted to talk to Allingham and me, so next morning we went over to the saloon and waited for him to show up, because he was sleeping late. In the meanwhile I figured I'd tell Allingham the news about Ruby and me.

So I says:

"Me and Ruby is thinking of getting married."

Well, Allingham looked plumb took aback.

"What happened to your girl in Oklahoma — is she dead? "

"She's dead to me," I says, "henceforth." Then I told him about the letter I'd got, and what it said. And he shaken my hand cordial.

"Ruby's a fine girl, Lem! My heartiest congratulations! . . . Shall we drink to her health? "

So we lined up at the bar and I took sody. And Allingham looked at me right funny.

"What's wrong? " he asked curious.

"I've done quit drinking," I told him.

"What for? "

"It ain't good for my health," I told him; "besides, I promised it to Ruby."

At that Allingham laughed right immod'rate, and I asked him what was so humorous about being sensible.

"The motivation," he says brisk. "Man is weak and wobbly and needs a crutch when he tries to stand on his hind feet. With some it's religion, with some money, with some their figure. But most often it's a woman. . . . You always knew drinking didn't do you any good, yet you wait till a girl drives you to wise resolution. . . . Here, I'll just give you an object lesson on the difference between expediency and principle: I'll quit too — not because of ulterior motive but because my self-respect demands it. Give me soda, Brad! "

"Well," I says, "I hope your self-respect keeps arter you as reg'lar as I got a idee Ruby will me! "

So then we drinked the soda. It tasted right puny.

Then I says:

"Now that I'm aimin' to get married I got to give some considerations to the future. Brad only agreed to give us credit till after the dance. I got to step out and get me a job so I kin be self and wife supporting."

"Wait till we have our talk with this friend of Miss Hallock's," says Allingham; "it may not be necessary for us to be wage slaves yet awhile."

So I couldn't think of no good objections to that plan and we waited a spell and finally the stranger feller come over and we all sat down to a table sociable.

"Now," says the feller, "before we start talking business, I don't believe we've gone through the formality of exchanging names as yet. . . . Mine's Hallock — Harkness Hallock."

Well, when I come to think of it, there hadn't been no occasion so far for the young feller to let on what he was called; but I hadn't figured it was Hallock, by no means. Nor Allingham hadn't either, I don't reckon, because his eyes begun to open up sparklin' and his features crinkled in a smile like a pore man's lease, from year to year.

"Hallock?" he says jubilant. "Then you must be a relative of Miss Hallock's — ?"

"Her brother," says the feller, kind of smiling.

So Allingham shaken hands with him right cordial.

"I got to have a drink," he says intense. "Brad, take the orders!"

So Brad come over and this Harkness Hallock taken a drink and I took sody and Allingham ordered two sodas, when I reminded him of his self-respect. But he didn't swaller more'n half of the second bottle.

"I want to talk to you chaps about the Golden Nuggett," says Hallock when the honors was done.

"Did you find ore there?" asked Allingham hopeful.

"Well," says Hallock, "I didn't have much of a chance. Because when I reached the claim I ran into a six-foot barbed wire fence stretched around the property, and guarded by an armed Mexican patrolling up and down inside. And when I hailed him that lawyer Sena who came down with me strolled out of a log cabin near the shaft and came over to inform me visitors weren't welcome."

"That's the feller got the option contracts!" I said.

"The same. But what's more important — he's got the mine: at least physical possession of it."

"I wonder what his game is?" Allingham put in.

"He wouldn't say, though you may believe I asked him. . . . But I'll tell you what I think."

"Yes?"

Hallock studied a minute, then says:

"I told you the other night that I was acting on my own. But there was something I didn't tell you. I've been informed that the Seven States Amalgamated are buying in the locality of the Golden Nuggett, to extend their gold-bearing properties at Mogollon. You know the company?"

"Shore," I says, "it's the trust. They own the major'ty of paying claims in this Southwestern country."

"I'd heard rumors of their activity," Allingham says casual, "but I wasn't certain the Golden Nuggett was in the block they're after."

The stranger glanced at Allingham surprised.

"I didn't know it was a rumor—I thought it was a secret: the Seven States operations, I mean. . . . However, I think I can add to your information, because I've established the fact to my own satisfaction that the Golden Nuggett is in the line of the main vein—it's something of a key location. They'll have to have it to complete their plans, I'm convinced."

"Well?" Allingham asked businesslike.

"Well, my idea was to get possession of the claim and hold it for a good stiff price from the Seven States."

"That's my idea still," says Allingham short.

Hallock sort of smiled.

"But Sena's on the ground?"

"An awkward obstacle, but not an insurmountable one. Have you any plan to suggest?"

So Hallock thunk a minute, frowning.

"My idea is that Sena's playing a lone hand—that he has an inkling of the situation and hopes to hold the claim till he can make some sort of dicker with the trust. I think that's why he and his crowd tried to get the sheriff out of jail—so he could pretend to be acting under color of law—"

"Where does Andrew Jackson come in?" I asked. "The claim's still his legally, ain't it?"

Hallock shook his head doubtful.

"A standing in court can be established on a mere pretense of legality. If the Seven States get even a bogus

title through Sena — who can claim anything — Andrew wouldn't have much of a chance against the trust lawyers at Socorro. . . . But here's what I suggest: I understand some of the general officers of the Seven States are due at Silver City soon, my plan is to go to Silver and get in touch with the company's local representative, a lawyer named Harvey. I can get to him through letters I have, and make him a proposition, threatening action if we don't get a square deal. He might hesitate to negotiate with Sena if he knows it's not Andrew but ourselves he'll have to fight for title to the Golden Nuggett."

Allingham was looking right thoughtful.

"Have you heard who's coming out for the Seven States? "

"There's Caleb T. Wright, the President, and Watson, the general manager, and a bunch of experts."

Then Allingham nodded satisfied-like.

"That's all right. . . . But how do you know Sena hasn't already made his dicker? That he isn't working at this minute for the Seven States? "

At that Hallock threw up his hands.

"Of course it's possible. But if it's the fact we might as well quit right now. If they've gone that far they'll go the limit! "

Well, Allingham smiled right cold-blooded.

"There's no reason why we can't do the same, is there? . . . As for quitting, we haven't got started yet. Now listen — I had a talk with Harvey over the phone yesterday and he as much as told me to keep my hands off; so I concluded Sena was a mere agent for the company. He probably made the deal when you came through Silver. That being the case, I thought we'd better clear up the matter of the title as soon as possible."

He taken a telegram from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"When I saw how things were breaking I wired John Arnold at the Bar T ranch to buy the mine from Andrew, on the strength of the options we had. . . . Read his reply!"

So Hallock and me glanced at the telegram right interested, and this is what it says:

"Have purchased Golden Nuggett in your name papers follow by mail good luck."

"Well!" says Hallock, mopping at his forehead with his handkerchief. "You didn't lose any time, did you? . . . But it looks as if you had things pretty well ribbed up without any help from me. This seems to let me out."

With that he made as if to rise, but Allingham repressed him and says:

"On the contrary, with Mr. Allen's consent I want you to throw in with us. As for what you can do, cast your eye over this!" He drew a letter from his coat and handed it to Hallock. "That's a note I've taken the liberty of addressing to Mr. Caleb T. Wright, president of the Seven States, in which I offer him the Golden Nuggett mine free of incumbrances for the sum of one hundred thousand dollars. What I'd like you to do is go to Silver and watch for the inspection party and hand this to Mr. Wright when he steps off the train. I think I can promise that we'll hear from him thereafter without delay. . . . In the meantime as long as Sena and his crowd hold the mine there's a danger that we may get dished. We've got to get him out."

Well, we looked at each another puzzled, and Hallock says:

"I don't see how you're going to do it."

"It's a problem," admitted Allingham; "we need men and ammunition and —"

"What you need most in this crisis," says Brad, coming from behind where he'd been standing listening, "is advice. Why'n't you just invite me into this here conference? A hundred thousand would go a long ways in Alma if spread round judicious!"

We all stared at Brad for a minute, him breaking in unexpected that way, but he didn't seem upset none. He just smiled back at us as if he was one of the fambly.

Then he says:

"Besides, you'll need a small extension of credit, I wouldn't wonder, to git through the next few days while your fortune hangs into the balance like. 'Twould be right pitiful if you fellers should get hunger struck and die before you got your hands onto the cash!"

Allingham was looking at him hard.

"I believe you're right, Brad!" he come out then. "You could get a posse and make suitable financial promises to its members and we could ride over and run that bunch of half-breeds off our property *pronto!*"

"Sure," says Brad, "why not? . . . I wouldn't want but ten per cent of what you git out'n the mine to pay me for my trouble and settle with the boys."

Well, it seemed like a right good plan of Brad's, so after talking over the details it ended in us agreeing on the main features and taking a drink to seal the bargain like. And Allingham and me had sody — though it gagged us, for a fact. It's right odd how soon a feller finds his limit when he ain't drinkin' p'izen, but only somethin' that's good for his system.

Then the stranger feller, which was now our pardner, let on he'd best be moving, because a car had come out that

morning to take him and his sister in to Silver. So we all went over to the hotel to see them off.

Allingham tried to get in a word alone with Miss Hallock before she left, but he couldn't arrange it. He had to say good-bye with the rest of us at the car side.

At the last minute he shaken her by the hand and says:

"Before you go, Miss Hallock, I must tell you there's an unknown female who's been cruelly slandered for the past few days — I've never been married in my life! "

So Miss Hallock laughed and says:

"I hope you won't continue unfortunate! "

Allingham was starting to say some more, but just then the driver started up and they moved off, waving their hands right cordial. And for sev'el minutes Allingham didn't seem to reckernize his surroundings.

Finally he says:

"Isn't that Hallock a great chap? I don't know when I've taken a fancy to anyone so quick! "

"His name's in his favor," I says, but Allingham didn't pay no attention, just looked down the road where the dust from the automobile was still floating round in the air.

So I says:

"What for did you want to send a letter to that Caleb T. Wright for? He wouldn't know you from a loon."

"On the contrary," says Allingham, "he would."

"How come? "

Allingham looked at me pensif for a spell, and then says:

"I reckon the time's come when I'd better tell you that this Caleb T. Wright, besides being president of the Seven States Amalgamated, has the added distinction of being a father of mine."

"What? " I says surprised. "Why, they say he's a millionaire! "

"Well," says Allingham short, "they say I'm a millionaire's son, and I've never had any good reason to doubt it. At least I was brought up foolish enough to make the supposition credible."

When he says that it give me a turn, for a fact. I could see he was meaning what he said, but yet I couldn't get used to the idee at all. Because Allingham is right like an ordinary feller — when he ain't talking, that is.

So I says:

"Well, I ain't no hand to call a friend a liar without good reason; but yet it don't seem nach'ral for no sensible feller to leave all them millions lonesome thataway and come out here in the West and begin livin' so dangerous we don't hardly know in advance the spot we're going to starve to death at."

"I've never claimed to be sensible," says Allingham. "And as for those millions, don't waste your sympathy on them. They're busy and contented and not lonely at all, I'll wager! "

But I was still wondering.

"Did you get drove out'n your house and home? " I asked, and Allingham laughed.

"Only by ennui: I got sick and tired of being supported in the style to which I'd become accustomed without doing anything in particular to deserve it. Also it was a bore trying to live up to my income, which never interested me anyhow except in the process of distributing it. So after the war, when a few real things happened to me, I picked out an alias and started West to enjoy life by making my own way for a change."

"Well," I says, "you've done that — almost. . . . But you ain't going to get proud and refuse that hundred thousand dollars for the Golden Nuggett, are you? If we git it? "

"No," says Allingham short, "by no means."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CLAIM JUMPERS

BRAD was as good as his word about arranging for a posse and all, so we could drive out Sena and his *compadres* from the Golden Nuggett claim and take charge there ourselves. As soon as the sale contract come down from Vegas with a letter from Mr. Arnold telling how he had give Andrew the money for the mine and how Andrew was fixing to buy a ranch and enough licker for him and oats for Sadie for the balance of their lives, Brad got the Alma fellers together at the saloon and explained the situation to them.

“These two,” he says, pointing out Allingham and me, “have title to the property, but that Mexican Sena has jumped the claim and we got to jump it back again. I’ve put a couple of the pris’ners from the jail through the third degree by refusin’ ’em cigareets till they told what they knowed, and they admitted it was a scheme of Sena’s gettin’ the sheriff out so they could take him over with them and make their occupation of the mine look more legal. They was disappointed in that, as you all know, so now Sena is holdin’ on with a bunch of *chile*-eaters he picked up in Mogollon, till he can turn the mine over to the Seven States company. So what we’ve got to do is to run him and his crowd out and put these righteous owners in possession.”

Well, the Almians looked at each another puzzled, because they couldn’t yet figure where they come in to make anything out’n the deal.

"Of course," Brad went on, "there'll be a slug of money pass hands when the mine is finally disposed of, and I wouldn't wonder if consid'able of it stayed here in the little town of Alma before all's said and done. At the least, I kin guarantee that anybody which joins the posse voluntary will have a pocket full of silver dollars when the smoke blows off. But them I'm forced to deputize to help uphold the law won't get nothing only glory."

So then the Almians cheered and offered to join voluntary in a body, and Brad distributed rifles and ammunition and tin badges and swore everybody in as deppitys and so we started for the claim about noon.

I shore hated to leave Ruby, after we'd just got ingaged and all, because I didn't know in advance how the affare was going to turn out. When there's shooting going on a feller's always liable to get winged, no matter how keerful he acts. But Ruby was right encouraging. After she'd examined my 30-30 carbine to see if the action was working easy and the barrel clean, she give me a kiss and says:

"After all, they're only Mexicans. And I can trust you to be prudent, can't I? "

"Yes," I says, "as usual."

I says that because it's been one of my experiences that a feller which wears a welcome sign on his face when trouble starts is apt to git his features used for a doormat afore he's through. And I ain't never been one to act reckless just for the fun of it.

Well, when we was ready Brad took charge, and he decided not to go through Mogollon for fear the news of our plans would leak out, so we took the lower road across Whitewater mesa and up into the hills by trail. It was a right tedious ride, and what made it worse was that Sim

Wood kept time to the hosses' hoofs by singin' a right sad song about a outlaw named Black Jack Davy.

It started out thisaway:

Black Jack Davy went a-singin' down the road
Singin' his song so gay-hay-lee,
Singin' his song till the wild woods rang
Singin' his song to his lay-hay-dee.
Singin' his song to his lay-hay-dee.

Then this is what Black Jack sung — part of it, that is:

Would you dee-sert your happy ho-home,
Would you dee-sert you bay-hay-bee,
Would you dee-sert your husban' dear
All for Black Jack Day-hay-vee,
All for Black Jack Day-hay-vee?

The song was some longer than the sample I've give. About a hundred verses or better. And it told all about what this Black Jack done, and how the gal left her rel'tives including the infant mentioned and took up with the outlaw permanent. He must of been right fassinating of a feller. But not moral hardly at all.

Well, finally the trail and the song come to an end together. And then we begun riding cautious through the woods, climbing the slope of the main ridge so's to get below the claim and come in on the Mexicans unbeknownst. We'd climbed a couple of thousand feet from the Alma level by now, and the woods was thick and cool, pine and fir mostly, with now and again a clump of aspen shining white where the sun struck them, or a long grassy draw along a stream. 'Twas right purty and soothing to look at, and I couldn't help but think how tomorrow when some of us fellers might of bit the dust mebbe, 'twould be just as purty

and lighthearted-looking as 'twas now. The woods don't lose no stren'th worriten over what happens to somebody else, and that's a fact.

We got close to the claim without nobody giving the alarm. So we gathered together behind a little knoll south of the location to figure out our plans.

From where we was we could see the mine by peekin' over the top of the knoll through the brush. 'Twas in a draw, cleared of trees, the tunnel dug horizontal in a hill opposite and a log cabin fifty feet or so from the mouth. Around the edges of the cleared ground was a barbed wire fence about six feet high, like Hallock had said. And inside was a Mexican walking around with a gun on his shoulder, while over by a camp-fire on the ground near the cabin were four or five other fellers loafing, with their rifles in easy reach. We couldn't see Sena nowhere.

Allingham was for going to the fence and calling on the bunch to surrender, but Brad wouldn't have it that way.

"'Twould be nothing more or less than suicide," he says; "a couple of fellers in that cabin could pick us off like we was rats, while the light holds. But it won't be a grate while till sundown, and then 'twill be a different story. We'd best wait till then and make a surprise attack, I reckon."

The Almians were all in favor of Brad's sudgestion, so we sat down and waited while the shadows got longer and the dusk slipped in and a Mexican from around the camp-fire begun singin' a plumb long-winded song in Spanish. It made Sim Wood right restless, because I reckon he would of like to have drowned the feller out by some more rev'lations about his friend Black Jack Davy.

Finally sundown come and it got dark right sudden, and we all moved over the knoll cautious and crept up nigh

the fence. We figured mebbe in the darkness we could stretch the strands apart and crawl through, but they was strung too close and pulled too tight. Besides, the feller with the gun come by every little while, so presently we snook back to the knoll again.

There was more Mexicans around the camp-fire now, watching the Dutch oven with bread baking and a pot of *frijoles* simmering on a bed of hot coals nearby, and a big coffee-pot steaming. 'Twas right cozy-looking and for a minute I felt sorry we had to disturb the bunch. But just then I saw Sena step out of the cabin with a rifle on his arm and walk over to the fire, and then I didn't have no further quallums — on account of the underhanded way he'd acted.

"Now's our chance," Brad whispered when Sena appeared, "the whole herd's in the open. Then he drewed a pair of wire-cutters from his pocket and shoved them at me, because unfortunately I was nearest. "Here," he says, "it's a good thing I thought to bring these along; take 'em and crawl up to the fence when the guard gits apast, and cut the wire. Then stand up and give a right soft whistle and we'll jump in after you and throw down on the Mexicans. And don't nobody waste no time with them if they don't act pretty — shoot! "

Well, I sort of hesitated a minute, because I ain't had no grate amount of experience with using wire cutters, but the guard was just going apast and all the Almians begun saying, "Go ahead, Lem! " and then I happened to think of them hundred thousand dollars, so with that I dropped onto my knees and started crawling toward the fence.

When I got close I begun cutting the barb' wires as fast as I could, beginning with them nearest the ground. I got along all right till I come to the top, where I had to reach

up on my toes. And just then there come a lullin' in the talk around the camp-fire and you could hear the snip of the wire-cutters plain as I cut through the last strands.

The Mexicans jumped up and stood listening, and I was ascared to whistle for our fellers for fear the enemy'd hear. And whilst I was waiting for an idee, the guard come charging back hollering, "Who's there!" And when he seen me he stopped askin' questions and throwed down on me and I grabbed for my six-shooter and just then a rifle cracked behind me and the guard dropped.

I jerked around quick and found Allingham right behind me. He must of follered, I reckon, without my knowing it.

"One down!" he says cheerful, and with that he lep through the wires and headed for the fire, with me after him. And I heard a scramblin' in the brush behind, and then a yellin', and I figured our side was getting into the action.

When the Mexicans around the fire seen Allingham and me bearing down on them and heard the noise the Almians was making in behind, they stuck their hands up and let on they was ready to surrender. And I thought to myself, this is plumb easy! But I was forgetting Sena, because before I knowed what he was up to he ripped out a string of Mexican cuss words and raised his gun and fired point-blank at Allingham as he hit the circle of firelight. Then he whirled and disappeared in the mine tunnel, while bullets spattered all around the opening.

Allingham never made a sound, just threw up one hand and slumped down on the ground in a heap. I leaned over hasty and felt of his shirt in front and my hand come away red. For a minute I went numb, sort of. Then all of a sudden it come to me what Sena had done and I must of gone plumb out of my mind, because I jumped acrost

the fire and dived into the tunnel after the murd'rer without even waiting to figure whether it was sensible or not.

I didn't have no idee how far the shaft went, and ordinarily I would have traveled slow; but now I stumbled forrard reckless, with no thoughts only to come up with Sena as soon as I could make it. It was me or him, I figured — nor I wasn't keerin' how quick the jam occurred.

I couldn't see ahead of me no more'n if I was blind, but I kept going into the tunnel till I come to where it made a sharp turn, and thar I run smack agin a rock wall. And at the same time a rifle cracked to my right and I felt the wind of the bullet past my head.

I fired at the flash instinctive and turned and walked bent-over down the passage towards where the gun had sounded, emptying my Colt's as I went. Then when the magazine was spent I grabbed her by the barrel, waiting for the next shot from Sena's weapon. And it wasn't till I tripped over something soft on the tunnel floor that I knowed I didn't have to search no longer.

I struck a match and found I'd caught the Mexican twice, once in the arm and once clean through the middle of the forehead. Then I straightened up and groped my way back towards outside.

The other Mexicans were hogtied and harmless now, and the fight was done. When I asked where Allingham was they showed me where they'd carried him to the cabin and laid him on a bed there and washed and bandaged the wound the best way they could. And Brad says one of the boys had rode to Mogollon for a doctor. So I sat down by the bed and waited till the doctor come.

The wound was in the chest, they said, and it was serious; because Allingham's eyes was closed and his face was right white and you couldn't hardly feel his pulse at all. And

when I begun to think of all we'd went through together and how cheerful and entertainin' he'd been, even when pickings was slim and prospects pore, I declare, it plumb got to me to have to set there doing nothin' only mope with him mebbe dying before my eyes.

He hadn't moved nor spoke when the doctor finally galloped in, 'long about midnight, and begun examining the wound. The doctor looked right grave when he got through, and I didn't dare ask him what the chances was. But when he seen me hangin' round he says:

"He's alive — that's about all. We'll know more to-morrow if he holds out. I'll stay on here till the turn comes one way or the other."

Then he druv me to bed, because he said I couldn't do no good staying up any longer. But I didn't sleep right sound.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SMILES OF FORTUNE

IT was the middle of afternoon, the day after he got drilled, before Allingham come alive. And then he was in a high fever, so that for a time it didn't look like he had more'n a even chance to pull through. The Almians had gone home by then, and the doctor and me took turns watching Allingham, and I done the cooking.

Things went on thisaway for a couple of days without no news from outside, and then one morning who should show up but Ruby, riding one of Brad's hosses and bringing some home-made soups and such from the hotel. The fellers which took the pris'ners down to Alma had told her what all had happened, she said.

I was right glad to see Ruby, and to hear she was still in the same notion about gettin' married, because I'd begun to suspect gals of bein' fickle since the experience I'd had. And now that we was in safe possession of the Golden Nuggett it looked as if 'twould be a pity if Ruby should miss out on sharin' my part of the stake we expected to git. So when she said she had been faithful since I'd been gone I told her how sick Allingham was and how we was hopin' to pull him through with good luck.

I told her also about him claimin' to be a son of Caleb T. Wright, president of the Seven States Amalgamated.

"I'm not surprised," she says; "it always struck me Allingham was too careless about handling money to have ever earned his own living."

"It seems funny though," I says, "that he'd leave a position where he could spend money that was earned for him."

So Ruby kind of smiled.

"That's natural," she says, "if he got tired of the experience. Poverty probably meant adventure to him — which is the same as saying variety — which means a change. Most kids are that way — and Allingham's a kid still, for all his years. He's just looking for toys, so far. But he's a right nice boy, nevertheless."

"You know, Ruby," I says then, "when we first come I was afeared you was going to get ingaged to Allingham."

Well, Ruby opened her eyes wide and looked right indignant.

"To Allingham? . . . I'd sooner climb into a nunnery. The worst I could ever get on a feller like that would be infatuated, in which case I'd stay in bed till I was cured. Why, it would take me ten years to train him to where he'd be bridle-wise and safe to handle. He's broncho! . . . Besides, he's over head and ears in love with Miss Hallock."

Then Ruby told me how Miss Hallock had called up a time or two from Silver to see if Allingham was going to get well, when she learned he'd been hurted. And she says Miss Hallock and her brother were going to stay on there till they saw what happened, and how we made out with the mine and all. Then Ruby went back to Alma, and I was shore sorry to see her go.

Well, Allingham's fever kept up a few more days and then one night the doctor says to me:

"The next twelve hours ought to tell the story. You can stay with him for a while now, but let me know if he gets any worse."

So I sat by the bed, while he kept muttering to hisself

like he'd been doing constant for I dunno how long. He mentioned a lot of things and people I never heard of, calling the same names over and over till I was dizzy. Then he got right quiet for a spell, and I reckon I must have dozed off, because the first thing I knowed I heard him speaking my name. And his voice sounded right natural.

"Lem!" he says plain, "Lem! Where are we?"

I opened my eyes and seen him looking at me puzzled, his eyes sunk in his head and his hand sort of picking feeble at the comforter over him.

"Well," I says, "you shore give me a turn. How you feeling?"

He stared at me solemn a minute, then says slow:

"I feel sleepy — awf'ly sleepy!"

With that he closed his eyes and drewed a deep breath and begun to sleep right peaceful. And I roused out the doctor, who run over and give one look at him and then turned and smiled at me cheerful.

"It's the crisis," he says. "If he sleeps like that till morning I'll give him a chance."

Well, he didn't wake till next afternoon, and he was like a different man when he come to. And from then on he picked up by the minute, till it wasn't a grate while till the doctor began to talk about taking him down to Alma.

But before that time come we had visitors.

I was setting by the bed about the middle of the afternoon, and Allingham was looking out through the cabin window at the trees swaying gentle and a patch of blue sky in between, when we heard a rumpus outside and directly a big raspy voice comin' towards us. And then a tall, heavy-set feller reachin' on towards sixty or better come stoopin' through the door, turned sideways so's his shoulders wouldn't lift the door jambs from off'n the sill.

He stood blinking a minute at Allingham from under scraggly grey eyebrows, his head bent forrard and a jaw like a hoss-block shoved out under his mustache. He looked right hostile.

"Well," he says abrupt, "what are you doin' here in this God-forsaken hole? "

Allingham kind of smiled and let his eyelids droop down over his eyes like he does, and says pleasant:

"I'm convalescing, so the doctor assures me, though it's a slow process. . . . But about this being a God-forsaken hole — I'm not so sure of that. I was under the impression that it was a rare and desirable and most valuable hole, for some purposes." With that he broke off and waved his hand towards me. "But let me introduce my partner and co-owner of the Golden Nuggett, Mr. Lem Allen — Mr. Caleb Wright, my father! "

The old fellow glanced at me sharp and give a grunt and I says, "Pleased to meet your acquaintance, Mr. Wright! " and then he set down and stared at Allingham interested.

"You look like the devil! " he says. "But that doctor tells me you'll live. I've brought some men up with a stretcher to take you down to Alma, where I've left my car. You can drive in with me to Silver City and join me in a trip I'm making to the coast. After this experience I imagine you'll be ready to quit your present tramp's life and settle down to work."

"I was never fond of work," says Allingham reflectful, "you know that. But I'll be glad to get down to Alma and recuperate there for a while. Also there's a little matter of business I'd like to close up before I leave the vicinity. As you may recall, I made an offer of this property to the Seven States Amalgamated, through their

honorable president. The asking price, which I consider cheap in the circumstances, was a hundred thousand dollars."

Well, the old feller's eyes got right red and for a minute I was afeared he was going to bust out and lose his temper. Then all of a sudden he give a smile and blowed in his handkerchief with his nose. And when he smiled he looked like somebody else, because he showed his teeth cheerful and confident like Allingham does. Then I happened to notice his nose, which was the same build as Allingham's only even more important-looking, and I knowed Allingham had valid proof right there of his relationship with the old feller, because no two in the world could of had noses like them, except the two I was looking at.

Finally this Caleb T. Wright says:

"I suppose I should be glad you've begun to live by highway robbery instead of charity—it's a step upward. Maybe some day you'll be able to earn money. . . . There's a check deposited to your order at Silver City for the amount you mention. I was going to let someone else give you that news, however."

He rose and went to the door and waved his hand as he says this and who should come steppin' in but Miss Hallock, smiling plumb pleasant, and behind her Harkness Hallock with a grin all over his face.

"Your friends were generous enough to share my exile," said the old feller, laughing like he'd said something smart, "particularly when I assured them that they'd have better company on the way back, as my son was returning with us. . . . So see that you let yourself be persuaded! "

He was talking to Allingham, but Allingham wasn't paying no manner of attention. He was holding on to Miss

Hallock's hand and speaking soft and rapid like he was right glad to see her.

Well, after a minute the old feller says to Hallock:

"I guess we'd better go out and stir up those Mexicans or we'll never get back to town."

Then him and Hallock went out and on the way the old feller frowned at me like he was right riled about something, so I figured mebbe he imagined I was hired by the day and ought to be workin'. And ruther than spile the occasion by starting an argument I says:

"Well, I got some juniper wood to split."

So I went out too.

But then just as I was going round by the back of the cabin to the woodpile I happened to think that Allingham and Miss Hallock was left there alone and mebbe they'd start an interesting conversation which I'd ought to have in my novel book. So for the benefits of liter'ture and my readers, if I should happen to git any, I decided to slip around under the window where I could hear what was going on without being caught and accused of eavesdropping or nothing. So that's what I done.

No sooner I'd got set to listen than I ree'lized Allingham hadn't wasted no time, because he was right in the midst of asking Miss Hallock to marry him. Nor he didn't spare words none — 'twas plumb eloquent, for a fact. But when he got done I didn't hear no sounds of s'render, and I begun to wonder had something gone wrong with Allingham's system.

Then the gal says slow, like 'twas hard to get out:

"I'm sorry — so sorry. But you're too late. There's — somebody else. . . That's one reason why I — I tried to avoid you, on this trip we've made. I liked you enough to try to avoid you. I didn't even know you — yet I

liked you too much to try to flirt with you: that's something, isn't it? "

She kind of laughed when she said this, a trembly sort of laugh like it wasn't plumb sure 'twould last till it was executed. Then there was silens for a minute. And in the silens I could hear Allingham breathing, and I felt sorry for him, because I knowed he'd wasted a lot of good time thinking of this gal, and trying to meet up with her and all.

"You mean you—you *love* this somebody else?" he asked like he was shockt.

"I'm going to marry him," she says low.

At that Allingham cries out plumb eager:

"Then you *don't* love him! It's just a marriage of convenience—or rather it *was* to have been a marriage of convenience—"

"You're making things hard for me," she breaks in; "I've told you this because I do really like you. But there are other things in the world besides liking—even loving—"

"Oh, nothing half so important—surely!"

"That's the romantic view—the youthful view. You're awfully young, you know!"

"Thank God!" says Allingham fervent. "And you're young too—though you try to pretend to yourself that you're worldly-wise, sophisticated—blasé perhaps! . . . Tell me—wasn't this Western trip of yours—whatever its ostensible reason—planned really because you wanted time—time to contest this marriage with your heart, to fight against it, to—"

"The circumstances aren't in question," interrupts the girl; "I've given my word!"

She meant well enough, I reckon, but her voice wasn't

right convincing. I imagine she was aware that words had been broke afore now — gals' words too; I could of told her that.

Allingham must have noticed the weakening too, because he laughed right exultant.

“So it's only your word that stands between you and happiness? Well, we can surmount that difficulty if we stand together. Now that I know you love me — ”

“Please — please! ” begs the gal desperate. “Even if I should change in time — decide after all that I've made a mistake, that time isn't yet. We can't sit here discussing possibilities, don't you see — while my word's given! Talking — at this time — won't help! ”

“I won't say another word! ” says Allingham joyful.

Then they was a pause and a kind of rustling noise in the pause, and first thing I knowed — well, mebbe the feller Miss Hallock was engaged to back East might happen to read this here yarn, so I won't swear they was a kiss passed: but I'll take my Bible oath I heered a smack!

Then I begun to figure that long as Allingham had forsook words for action they wouldn't be nothing more I could put down in my book, so I went back and begun splitting juniper logs industrious.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS

WELL, Allingham didn't make the trip to the coast with his father after all, because the old feller got impatient and left before Allingham was hardly able to get about. And Hallock and Miss Hallock left too, after spending a day or two in the vicin'ty and fixing up the details about the Golden Nuggett deal.

We gave Brad his ten thousand dollars out of the hundred thousand we got, and all the Almians got theirs as agreed, and for a spell there was a lot of money changed hands in Alma. But Brad got the most of it in the long run. Then Allingham wanted to give Hallock a third of what was left after Brad had been paid, but he wouldn't take only ten thousand also, so Allingham and me split the balance of eighty thousand. And I give my share to Ruby to keep for me, because I hadn't never had no experience in handling that amount before.

Then when the vis'tors had gone and Allingham was able to get around better, Ruby and me got married. It turned out to be a double wedding, because Stub and Opal pulled off their affare at the same time, and it was consid'able of a event. We got a minister out from Silver City and the ceremony was helt in the dance hall made over for the occasion, and there was free licker for everybody the whole day, because Brad claimed he'd got overstocked since Allingham and me quit drinking.

There was folks from the towns and ranches round about

just like at Ruby's dance. And afterwards notices in the Silver City papers. And Allingham sent a right clever account to Griggs of the St. Johns Clarion, which Ruby liked the best of any.

Ruby looked right nice at the wedding in a new dress she got for the occasion, and Opal was seen to smile twice before the day was over. Allingham was best man, and he sent in to Silver and got special clothes for both of us, open in front with stiff biled shirts, so I didn't have no extry expenses for a suit. But it felt right nice to know I could have afforded one if I'd wanted.

Then when the wedding was over and Ruby and the other women were resting up at the hotel, eating cakes and tea and talking about how each another had looked, I picked the rice from under my collar and sought out Allingham, because there was something I wanted to ask him.

He'd been in a funny condition since Miss Hallock left, one minute ridin' along in the clouds like, and the next minute plumb down in the dumps. Seems things between him and her was left open by mutual consent far as anything practical was concerned, till she'd got back East and saw how the land laid. Then he was to jine her — mebbe. And in the meantime, far as I could make out, he was to hope. But I knowed Allingham too well to imagine he'd be satisfied with just hoping — he'd expect, also. And that's why, I reckon, he'd git impatient every so often and fall into a mood.

He was in one when I found him, setting glum on the porch railing outside the hotel. So I says:

"I'm married now, and I want to start right so I won't make no bobble at the go off. So I thought I'd ask for your advice."

Allingham looked at me kind of funny.

"Advice from me — about marriage?"

"Well," I says, "not about marriage exactly. Here's the facts of the matter. Since that Golden Nuggett come to the rescue and saved us all from the situation, as they say, Ruby and me have plenty of money to live on respectable for the balance of our days. But I've got to be doing something to keep from worriten over my new responsibilities, so it's a choice in my mind between buying a ranch or going into this writing game as a business."

So Allingham looked at me reflectful.

"What end of the writing game were you thinking of tackling?" he asks.

"I ain't just decided," I says. "I'll be finished with the volyum about our tour before a great while, but I don't reckon we'll be going on any more trips like the one we've made — nor I don't know as I'd keer to. So I'll have to write about something else. What would you write about if you were me?"

"I suppose you want to stick to novels — unless you'd like to be a poet!"

"No," I says, "I'm a married man now."

"Well, let's take novels then. There are two main kinds. The first kind are romances, which means fairy tales with a modern setting. You describe the world as you'd like to have it, and portray people as they'd be if they were free from the customary limitations of humanity. The chief character is usually a woman."

"What is the other kind?"

"The sort called realistic. In these the author's object is to pick out the most hopeless situations and the most unpleasant people and the most depressing facts he can imagine, and then tell how much everybody in the book suffered and what they thought about it. The resulting

picture is called a cross-section of life, but it isn't any such thing; because if it was the suicide rate would have exceeded the birth rate long since."

"What is the chief character in such books?"

"A woman, usually," says Allingham yawning.

"Well," I says, "I'm afeared I ain't had enough experiences with women to write about them."

"You'd better give up the thought of writing as a business in that case," Allingham decided, "because if you don't write about women you won't make any money — and if you don't make any money your wife will think you're wasting your time."

"That's just what Ruby says," I told him; "she thinks I better quit writing and git to work."

So Allingham looked at me surprised.

"Why did you consult me," he says irr'table, "if it was already decided?"

"Well," I says, "I wanted a couple of good arguments to tell Ruby why I agreed with her!"

At that Allingham jumped up with a right disgusted look on his face and stomped off, kicking at things in his way as he went along. Nor he didn't get over his mood for the balance of the afternoon.

But I didn't mind a grate deal, because I had a idee what was ailing him. I figured 'twas because he hadn't had no chance as yet to git in a position where he could be bossed by an affeckshunate wife. Of course I might of been wrong. But fellers are often funny thataway — about what makes them act up.

THE END

SEP 24 1923

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00021911756